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THE PRESENCE OF MARY

by

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PREFACE

For many years men and women engaged in the apostolate have asked for an explanation of Our Lady's role in their work. This book is a response to those requests; it is an attempt to show clearly and simply Mary's place in the apostolate.

First we shall behold the Blessed Virgin as the perfect model of Catholic Action. We shall see that her spirituality is really a spirituality of action, a spirituality suited for our imitation. In the second place, we shall learn that an interior life founded on intimacy with the Mother of Jesus Christ will achieve new vigor and burst into bloom.

We hope that this book will serve not the Cause of Mary alone but also in a special way the Cause of Catholic Action. For Catholic Action has a two-fold object: the sanctification of the laity and the Christianization of one's environment. It is the conviction of those who have studied the theology and history of the devotion to the Blessed Virgin that if recourse to the mediation of Mary were greater, progress in spiritual development would be more fruitful and consoling. A certain sterility in souls is frequently the result of partial misconception of the spirit of the Church.

The Blessed Virgin is in truth the Queen and the Teacher of Catholic Action. She is the Queen of Catholic Action because she is in the forefront of the battle against evil, in the midst of all her soldiers a strategist confident of victory. She is the Teacher *par excellence* because she fashions militant Catho-

lics in that particular type of interior life so essential to the true apostolate.

This meditation on Mary is meant to project new light on our own inner lives. We shall see how the character of Catholic Action takes form under Mary's hands, and in the pattern we shall discover the authentic portrait of the true follower of Christ.

Since we propose to show the role of Mary in our intimate life with Christ, we shall entitle our book, **THE PRESENCE OF MARY.**

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Part I

Queen of Catholic Action

LEADER OF THE CHURCH MILITANT

The Old and the New Testament and the Church are singularly one in showing us the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Queen of Catholic Action. Unquestionably Jesus alone is the Savior, the Head of His Mystical Body, the Church. But the Mother of Jesus was to have, in the design of God, no mere passing role of a herald such as that assigned to Saint John the Baptist. One might imagine that after the birth of Jesus, Mary, with all the honors of her rank, might have disappeared from the field where the great battle of humanity was raging. God had other designs. The divine maternity was to be the beginning of an eternal action. At the head of the armies that fight under the standard of Jesus, God placed the Virgin.

Both the Old and the New Testaments present Mary as the most active and powerful of Apostles charged by God to conquer the true enemy, the cause of all human ill—Satan. The history of the Church substantiates this idea. Mary's activity in the kingdom of God had to begin at the time of the fall of Adam in the terrestrial paradise and has to

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continue till the end of time. Today, yesterday, tomorrow—at all times—Mary is present with us in all our undertakings. She exercises her victorious sovereignty over each one of us and over the entire Church Militant. To forget this fact is to fail to recognize one of the most important truths of Holy Scripture.¹

THE "FIRST-BORN"

From its first page the Old Testament reveals to us the plans of the Divine Mercy. It teaches us that God conceived His plan, and having seen it fail, so to speak, He willed to bring it to a successful issue through the human means of Mary, the Mother of Christ. This is a fact. This is a truth of faith. The whole mystery of Redemption has been carried out under the emblem of the Virgin Mary. In the mind of the Holy Trinity, Mary is the first primogenitor.²

As the luster of the moon envelops the night so the presence of Mary surrounds all nature. The moon receives its light from the sun; Mary, however, engenders the sun which illumines her. The Incarnate Word appears in the divine plan as the fruit of the Virginal womb from which are born all eternal things, even the God-man Himself. In the merciful love of the Trinity, all humanity exists only through the Blessed Virgin; all is the effect of her cooperation. Were we not to regard Mary as the source of our supernatural activity, we would be out of harmony with the design of God.

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ASSOCIATE OF THE CREATOR

In the Divine Mind, Mary is not only the first-born of all creatures, she is the Queen of all creation. The world was fashioned lovingly by God because it was the kingdom of Mary; she collaborated in the work of the Creator; she was, so to speak, an associate with Him.

*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways,
before he made anything from the beginning.*

*I was set up from eternity, and of old before the
earth was made.*

*The depths were not as yet, and I was already con-
ceived, neither had the fountains of waters as yet
sprung out:*

*The mountains with their huge bulk had not as yet
been established: before the hills was I brought
forth:*

*He had not yet made the earth, nor the rivers, nor
the poles of the world.*

*When he prepared the heavens, I was present: when
with a certain law and compass he enclosed the
depths:*

*When he established the sky above, and poised the
fountains of waters;*

*When he compassed the sea with its bounds, and set
a law to the waters that they should not pass their
limits: when he balanced the foundations of the
earth;*

*I was with him forming all things: and was delighted
every day, playing before him at all times.*

(Proverbs viii: 22-30)

Let us summarize these magnificent words of Scripture. The Church explains that in these passages, which are applied to Mary, Mary is associated with her Divine Son in the work of creation.³ We believe this astounding doctrine. Marvelous

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truth! How consoling to realize that Mary was present at the divine ordering of this magnificent universe, which humanity loves passionately today! And why not, since all of the pure beauties of nature reflect the splendor of its Queen? Present at the creation, the Blessed Virgin is immediately introduced by God into her beautiful domain as the sovereign who was to watch over its portals and increase its splendor.

I, too, desire to enter Mary's domain now; to serve there with fruitful labor. And it is Mary herself who receives me. She speaks:

*Now therefore, my child, listen to me:
Blessed are they that keep my ways
Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not.
Blessed is the man that heareth me,
And that watcheth daily at my gates,
And waiteth at the posts of my doors.
He that shall find me, shall find life,
And shall have salvation from the Lord.*

(Proverbs, viii: 32-36)

Here, then, are the conditions under which I am permitted to work in this terrestrial garden under the orders of this Queen to whom God has entrusted the grandeur and grace of creation. Hereafter, can Mary ever be far from my thoughts? Under her guidance, I shall find my task ennobled, beautified, and rendered more fruitful. Human endeavor assumes new dignity in the service of such a Queen.

THE "CHOSEN ONE"

Can we forget that Mary is the unique spouse of God and the "chosen one"? ⁴ Without question,

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this title belongs also to the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Now, Mary is the ideal type of the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. Her perfection encompasses the Church and all humanity. God loves souls in her. His love, reposing in her immaculate soul, diffuses, descends upon all; radiates from her as light is radiated from the sun. In Mary alone is supernatural light pure; love of God without fail; and union with Him complete.

*Thou art all fair, my beloved,
And there is no spot in thee.
As the lily among the thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.
Unique is my dove, my perfect one,
She is the only one of her mother,
The chosen of her that bore her.*

(Canticle of Canticles, i: 14; ii, 2; vi, 8)

The eternal presence of Mary in our midst is, therefore, that of a spouse in whom God takes complaisance and in whom He places His hope for humanity. Ah! What would He not do for the love of Mary! These reflections give me the measure of my confidence.

ALL-POWERFUL WISDOM

To this Spouse God has entrusted all His glory. He has also, in a special way, communicated His power to her, the power of His wisdom and strength. In the wisdom of Mary⁵ repose justice and wealth superabundant; in her strength lie all means of efficacious action.

*For it is she that teacheth the knowledge of God, and
is the chooser of His works.*

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And if riches be desired in life, what is riches than the wisdom which maketh all things?

And if sense do work, who is a more artful worker than she of those things that are?

And if a man loves justice, her labors have great virtues, for she teacheth temperance, and prudence, and justice, and fortitude, which are such things as men can have nothing more profitable in life.

And if a man desire much knowledge, she knoweth things past, and judgeth of things to come; she knoweth the subtleties of speeches, and the solutions of arguments; she knoweth signs and wonders before they be done, and the events of times and ages.

(Wisdom, viii: 4-8)

The wisdom of Mary delves deep into the intrigues of men; it penetrates even the seductions of the devil; without it man is spiritually blind and easily ensnared. Furthermore:

... pondering them in my heart,

... that to be alive to wisdom is immortality.

And there is great delight in her friendship,

and inexhaustible riches in the works of her hands,

and in the exercise of conference with her,

wisdom; and glory in the communication of her words:

I went about seeking that I might take her to myself.

(Wisdom, viii: 17, 18)

Like Solomon, distrustful of myself, incapable of accomplishing the difficult task in which I am engaged, I shall ask God for the wisdom I lack. Since God has empowered the Blessed Virgin, our Queen, it is to her I address my prayer.

ALL POWERFUL IN COMBAT

Although the imagination is wont to associate weakness with feminine charm, it is strength which,

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by divine sanction, characterizes Mary. In her the qualities of the formidable warrior predominate.

History points to the figure of Jeanne d'Arc assuming command of the French forces, turning disaster into victory. A shepherdess personifies the heroism of a people! How feeble is that imagery by comparison with the Queen who embodies the strength of a God! At the head of an invincible army stands Mary, at God's own bidding, facing the fiend for her triumphant conquest. And we? To enlist in the army of God, there is neither hither nor yon. Only one way has been put before us ever since the dawn of creation: we must enlist under the banner of Mary.

ANGELS UNDER HER BANNER

Perhaps God chose Mary's banner to distinguish His elect amid the glittering throng of newly created angels. We venture to believe that their salvation or their damnation depended upon their acceptance of the plan of the Incarnation, that around the figure of the Virgin Mother of the Word Incarnate clashed the forces that finally resulted in the eternal separation of the good and evil in creation. At that time, the world "where all the sons of God rejoiced" was yet free from all stain. But the blessedness of that freedom, splendid as it was, would have been even greater, had the celestial spirits accepted the sovereignty of the Man-God and of His Mother.

Alas! Hell came into existence with the revolt of a great number of proud spirits. Demons hate the Virgin. Since their fall, the infernal horde has

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swarmed out of the abyss of fire to line up an army of conceited men against the immortal Church. On the other hand, God rewarded the angels faithful to the Virgin, by the vision of God, the everlasting, loving contemplation of the Trinity.⁶

Our predestination to glory does not differ from that of the angels. The elect will be the well-beloved children of the Mother of Jesus.

MARY'S BANNER AND FALLEN MAN

The first woman, whose name "Eve" signifies "mother of all the living," led man into sin. With Adam and Eve the human race fell from grace. Satan seemed revenged. But God said to the vanquished serpent: "I declare war between the woman and you; between her race and yours." At that moment Mary, the second Eve, the second "mother of all living" appears; at that moment Mary was appointed the head of those who struggle; leader of a race of soldiers. "She shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (*Genesis*, iii: 15)

Again, Mary's banner is raised and carries victory in its folds. Again Satan faces the inevitable dilemma that was the initial cause of his eternal misfortune. Now it is man who confronts the dilemma; for in order to crush the race of the serpent, he must side with Mary; he must choose between the Woman and Satan. Mary or Satan; there is no middle choice. As the Angels before them, men will separate into two armies. The outcome is inevitable;—the army of the Virgin will defeat that of Satan;

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for from the new Eve will be born the new Adam, Jesus Christ, from Whom will spring up the immortal members of the Mystical Body.

With Mary, then, victory for the soldiers of Christ is certain.

THE WARRIOR VIRGIN

The Virgin Mother battles with such martial ardor and with a success so tremendous that biblical writers apply to her a multitude of symbols which represent the power of arms. This well beloved Spouse of God appears "terrible as an army in battle array." (*Canticle*, vi: 3, 9) She is styled "the tower of David" and this tower is one which is built with bulwarks: "a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men." (*Canticle*, iv: 4)

Like Judith in the camp of Holofernes, Mary comes forth and manifests her power in favor of Israel: "Praise the Lord Our God," she cries; "... by me, His handmaid, and He has killed the enemy of His people by my hand this night." (*Judith*, xiii: 17f)

And they all adored the Lord, and said to her: "The Lord has blessed thee by his power, because by thee he has brought our enemies to nought.

And Ozias the prince of the people of Israel said to her: "Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth."

... and they all blessed her with one voice saying: Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of thy people."

For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened." (Judith, xv: 10-11)

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Mary, more powerful than Esther, will like Esther ever exert her power to save her people, that is, to save the Church from the bondage of Satan.

Again, the Virgin is typified by the Woman of the *Apocalypse* who, when attacked by a dragon, escaped on the wings of a great eagle. We are told that the dragon, filled with hatred against the Woman whom he cannot submerge, turns his fury against her children.

These are not scenes of pastoral loveliness which the name of Mary is wont to evoke; they are, briefly sketched withal, pictures of gigantic battles. Let us note well the peculiar character of this tremendous struggle. From the first Scriptural accounts, the action of Mary appears to consist of a sustained attack on Satan since he is the deceiver of souls, and simultaneously, of an exercise of infinite charity toward the souls of men who have been so deceived.

Catholic Action must distinguish between men and the diabolic spirits who would destroy mankind. Against the latter Catholic Action employs its implacable force in order to crush the head of the serpent. But toward men it has only charity, mercy, goodness, and devotedness. God wishes that His kingdom should come only through the benevolence of Mary.

HER KINGDOM OF MERCY

The presence of Mary is formidable only to demons; the Virgin's presence brings blessings to her whole race, for God has conferred upon Mary a kingdom of mercy: "Reserving to Himself power,"

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writes Gerson, "the Lord, in a certain manner, has entrusted the functions of mercy to the Mother of God, his spouse, who sits enthroned next to Christ." ⁷

That mercy is pleasing to God is certain. Mercy is an attribute of God. But God, when He chooses to exercise justice, does not appeal to the Virgin; whereas, to pour out His mercies upon us He makes use of the maternal heart of Mary. "Through her," writes Saint Alphonsus Liguori, quoting Saint Bernard, "the depths of divine mercy are opened, to whomsoever she wishes, when she wishes, and as she wishes." ⁸

*O Queen of heaven and earth, the kingdom of God consists of mercy and justice. Your Son, the blessed Jesus, somehow or other, reserves justice for His share of His kingdom; to you, O most holy Virgin, He has entrusted mercy as your share. And that is why this blessed Son bears the name of the Son of Justice and you are called Queen of Mercy. This partition has been prefigured in the offering of half his kingdom which Assuerus made to Queen Esther. This, O Mary, is what Christ, the true King, has done more efficaciously in your regard. If, then, yours is the kingdom of mercy, aid me; for on account of my sins, were I to receive justice, it would not be for my salvation, but for my condemnation.*⁹

Catholic Action, then, directed by Mary, will be one of mercy, not of justice. Its weapons will be victorious provided they are weapons of charity.

MARY'S GIFT

Mary's privileged function in Catholic Action is that of giving Jesus Christ to souls. For four thous-

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and years Holy Scripture has pointed out this decree of Almighty God: God, by an infinite condescension ordained that humanity's immeasurable stress would bring to pass the birth of the Word. For the great sorrowful dream of men would find realization in the purity of Mary. Mary alone could bring about this fruition. It is she who will bear the Savior and give Him to suppliant souls.

Furthermore, the Blessed Virgin is associated with Jesus as the object of the prophecies and the end of the Sacred Writings. Scripture always points to salvation as coming from a place that represents the Virgin; to reach the agent of salvation, one must pass through this chosen place.

Mary is, in effect, the *New Eve* who gives life to those that have lost it; she is the *ark*, floating upon the waters of the deluge, preserving the seed of the just; she is the *golden urn* wherein manna, the nourishment of the living, is contained; she is the *table* whereon rest the sacred loaves of proposition; she is the *censer* from which rises the fragrance of burning coals; the *holy ark of the covenant* which houses the divine law; the *golden candelabra* where glows the light of truth; she is the *rod of Aaron* that produces the miraculous flower; the *fleece* on which falls the heavenly dew; she is the *garden* wherein grew the tree of life; she is the *gate of the East* through which the God of Israel alone might pass; the mysterious *ladder* upon which the Lord leaned; the *house* filled with the glory of God; the light *cloud* which carries a shower of graces; she is the

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sealed fountain whence flows the river of living water; she is the *mountain* whence came the stone which overthrew pagan empires.

Life, bread, light, fire, living water, all these salutary blessings, how can we obtain them if we do not ask them of Mary? Has God provided two plans of redemption? There is only one in the Bible.

Catholic Action, to be fruitful, must give Jesus Christ to souls. That is the peculiar and original function of Christians. But, can humanity be fruitful without the aid of the Virgin Mother? Holy Scripture has answered clearly.

MARY IN THE GOSPELS

With less emotion and poetry than appears in the Old Testament but with more precision and decisiveness, God shows us in the New Testament the paramount importance of the presence of Mary in the plan of Redemption. One could name, as of a Rosary, the fifteen mysteries of Mary's presence: the five joyous, the five sorrowful, and the five glorious mysteries.

From another point of view, we distinguish in the New Testament four periods of Mary's presence: first, that of the infancy or the hidden life of Jesus in His Mother; second, that of the apostolate of Christ or the hidden life of Mary in her Son; third, that of Calvary or the hidden life of the Church in Mary; fourth and last, that of Pentecost or the hidden life of Mary in the Church.

These four periods of Mary's presence or Mary's

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action are deeply significant to us apostles. In bold strokes the nature of Catholic Action is carved out before our human understanding. Faithful to her predestined role, Mary, without the least hesitancy will fulfill her place as leader. As Mary advances through those four periods of her life, she continues to crush the head of the serpent until finally she restores humanity to its first dignity.

We can do no better in the rest of this book than to present "Communiques of Mary's victories."

JESUS HIDDEN IN HIS MOTHER

The Gospel of the childhood of Christ, which extends from the Annunciation to the Baptism, could be called the Gospel of Mary; for Jesus is presented here only in the womb of His Mother, or in her arms, or under her authority. Assuredly, the principal Person is the Man-God, but He is hidden. There is little manifestation of His divinity nor even of His character as the Messiah. He is the Child of a worker's family of Nazareth.

Mary is the mistress of the home. Her contemporaries take notice only of her. Joseph appears somewhat in the background. As seen time and again in Scripture, he does not equal the Virgin in importance. The whole scene is filled with the presence of her who cooperated directly in the Incarnation of the Word. The Mother of Jesus makes all decisions with Joseph, almost always takes the initiative. The God-Child acquiesces passively. Is

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it not Mary who is taken aback and who does not comprehend the independence of Jesus when, on one occasion, without her permission, He remained among the doctors in Jerusalem?

Thereupon begins the fulfillment of the Scriptural prophecies; for during this first period—we shall see Mary inflict terrible set-backs on her enemies. With these devastating catastrophes to the enemies of God and of humanity she inaugurates her campaign. Mary's action is one of conquest.

CHRIST, THE GIFT

One must not judge the importance of the work of the Virgin by some superficial tokens, but by the immensity of the disaster which the Prince of Darkness sustained.

The same rule of evaluation should be applied to Catholic Action. Who will ever measure the lasting effects of the Incarnation of the Word for the re-establishment of fallen humanity and the glorification of an offended God? Now, on the part of humanity, Mary alone cooperated directly in the Incarnation; God, Who accomplishes this miracle, gives an amazing share in it to Mary Immaculate. Compared with the *Fiat* of creation from which sprang the universe, the *Fiat* of Mary is the more glorious in its effects; for by Mary's ever-ready will to cooperate with the designs of Redemption is born, not heaven and earth, but Christ Himself.

*A rod shall come forth out of the root of Jesse,
A flower shall rise out of his root.*

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*On him shall repose the spirit of the Lord,
The spirit of wisdom and of knowledge,
The spirit of counsel and of fortitude,
The spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.
And He shall strike the earth with the rod of the
breath of His lips, he shall slay the wicked.
In that day the root Jesus, who standeth for an en-
sign of the people, him the Gentiles shall beseech,
and his sepulchre shall be glorious. (Isaias, xi:
1, 2, 4, 10).*

*For a Child is born to us and a son is given to us.
And the government is upon his shoulders.
And His name shall be called Wonderful, Consellor,
God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come,
the Prince of Peace. His empire shall be multiplied
and there shall be no end of peace: He shall sit on
the throne of David, and in his kingdom. To estab-
lish it and strengthen it with judgment and with
justice, from henceforth and forever: the zeal of the
Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaias, ix: 6, 7)*

The liturgy for Advent and likewise that of the Christmas season exhausts itself in an attempt to exalt the power of Jesus through the agency of His mother, in that first victory of Mercy. The *Fiat* of Mary intensified the everlasting despair of the fallen angels. True, it is Christ Who redeemed us. To forget that reality would be impious, but Christ was conceived and born of Mary. It is of as much importance to know by whom Christ is given to us as it is to know that the Gift Itself, Christ, is of infinite value.

One can say that it is Christ through whom the Virgin crushes the head of the serpent, since God willed that humanity should repair its fault through a child of its race.

It is impossible to do the least good except

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through Christ. Will Christ be given to us? That is the whole question. Yes; He will be given to us, as a fruit of the tree of Jesse, as a Child of the Virgin. We must ask Mary for Him.

BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

Motherhood demands long years of patience. Consider the generosity of a mother's love during the months of pregnancy, months devoted to the formation of the tender body of the child; think of her lavish care during the formative years of infancy and of childhood; and of her continued sacrifices during that longer stretch of years given to education. To calculate the acts of a mother's generosity would require as many letters as there are in the separate words of a long epic poem. Only a mother's love can tell this story of daily, hourly sacrifice.

Each act of the Mother of Jesus advanced the kingdom of God prodigiously; for the new Being to whom she gave her flesh and blood and strength, her attention, her tenderness, her heart and her soul, was the Sacred Body of Christ, the infinite price of sin, the instrument of salvation, the Victim of the eternal sacrifice, the Head of the Mystical Body, the second Adam, the cause of the resurrection of all mankind, the principle of incorruptibility. On the tree of Jesse ripened the fruit of life which Satan, mistaken in his turn, would taste and try to destroy, but which would bring death to him as did the serpent to Adam. "But thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (*I, Cor., xv: 57*).

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Never had an individual exercised on the world a greater influence than did that young Virgin when with her blood she gave to the Word His human nature. Externally, the world appeared unchanged: there was little evidence of one increase in the number of children born that first Christmas day. In reality, the universe was completely reversed: the heavens, closed until now, opened and leaned toward the earth as toward the dwelling-place of God.

The Virgin had become the center of creation and of merciful love. From her heart had poured forth the sole source of living water, that is to say, the source of reparation for sin and of the glorification of souls through grace.

We may learn that the efficacy of Catholic Action is not from without but from within. It is hidden in the bosom of the Church; it consists especially in bringing forth Jesus Christ in souls.

THE MYSTICAL BODY

During the nine months of waiting, comparable with the six days of creation, the Blessed Virgin was truly the creator, with God, of a new humanity. Because the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, Mary, Virgin and Mother, was the Church complete in its productivity. Moreover, the Church will never be other than the Woman to whom God gave the vocation of continuing supernaturally the Incarnation of the Word Incarnate, born of Mary. Furthermore, the Church, considered as the Mystical Body of Christ, was likewise born of that maternal heart

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from which the Word Incarnate received His human nature.

Every source of sanctification diffuses its fertility over the earth, with Mary. The Virgin yielded the branch on which, by Baptism, we are grafted; she formed the blood which, in the Sacrament of Penance, purifies us from our offenses; she molded the bread, which in the Eucharist nourishes our famished souls. Moreover, with her originated the priesthood which renders the Church fruitful, for in her womb human nature, which she gave to the Word, received the unction of the Holy Spirit. Through the hypostatic union Christ becomes the priest, and from this unique holy Chrism will flow all the oils which will consecrate priests of the New Law.

Search as we may, we shall find no good effected for mankind by Catholic Action which is not traceable to the womb of the Virgin Mother. Those who believe that they trace their regeneration directly to God forget that human nature lives supernaturally only when grafted onto the Man whom the root of Jesse brought forth. The salvation of mankind is effected by the Person of Christ and, therefore, by the Blessed Virgin who gave us Christ. It is more in keeping with our race and more becoming to our unworthiness that we approach Mary first, begging for the Man Who is God, rather than that we appeal directly to God for the God who is Man.

MARY WITH THE FATHER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Even before Jesus was born at Bethlehem, Mary had transformed the whole earth. Before calling

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upon us to imitate her, she had delivered her decisive blows and triumphed over Satan, apparently all alone.

Indeed, she is elevated above all human power, in a sense, even to the level of the divine. She is bearing Him whom the Father generates. She and the Father beget Him in the flesh at the same moment of time, and so perfectly that she and the Father can at the same time call Jesus: "My Son."

Today, the term or result of the paternal generation is not only a God, but the Child of Mary. With respect to Christ, God is the Father of Man, and Mary is the Mother of God. These two, God the Father and Mary, have one and the same Son. God the Father suffices for the birth of a God; a woman is needed to mother a man; but for the birth of the Christ, the Man-God, the Father and Mary were necessary. Such is the power of the Virgin that one can say of her with Denis the Carthusian: "Comparable with the Eternal Father, comparable and very like Him." ¹⁰

Christ leads us to His Father and to His Mother simultaneously; for by virtue of His two generations, He belongs to them equally. He tells us that we owe all to His Father Who has given Him to us and to His Mother who has given Him equally to us.

But this power which Mary possesses manifests itself more strikingly by the operation of the Holy Spirit in her. Jesus, we pray in the Creed, "is conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin

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Mary.” This collaboration is infinitely mysterious. If the role of the Holy Spirit surpasses our comprehension, that of his collaborator does not escape us. It is certain that in the soul of the Virgin the effusion of the Holy Spirit was at that moment so abundant that the Holy Spirit, bestowing His gifts superabundantly, dwells in each of us as in His temple. Our regeneration depends upon the virginal birth as the effect upon its cause. The operation which transforms us into children of God is but the extension of that which formed Jesus, the Author of grace, in the womb of Mary.”¹¹

*The power of the Most High and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit which made Mary bear the Savior also made her regenerate the baptized believer.*¹²

These are fundamental truths in the theology of Catholic Action. Just as nothing is done in the supernatural order except through the Holy Trinity, so nothing can be done except by Mary associated with the Trinity in the generation of the Savior.

VICTORY OVER HERESY

By the sole generation of the Word Incarnate, Mary has at once vanquished all heresies, as the liturgy states; for history furnishes evidence that the Fathers of the Church and the Councils have invoked the testimony of Mary in order to destroy the heresies that attack the truth and the integrity of the human nature of Christ. Her maternity has been the irrefutable argument against which all heresies have been successively broken down.¹³

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On the other hand, the devil tried to belittle the divinity of the Word¹⁴ so that he might attack anew the undeniably divine maternity of Mary. Later on he makes another attempt to deny either the duality of the natures of Christ or the physical identity of the person in the distinction of the natures. But again, the truth of the Maternity serves to expose and refute his fallacies. The title of Mother of God rises up forever as a bulwark against every heretical system of thought, whether that of the Nestorians, the Monophysites, the Monothelites, or the Adoptionists. Furthermore, he who studies from a Marian point of view the history of heresy in the early Christian Church, will soon perceive that "to understand the Word," he must, so to say, "understand Mary, the Mother of God," as an ancient writer put it. He will see that "the principal heresies concerning the Incarnation of the Word of God as well as all the errors which are associated with those same heresies, find in Mary their clear, precise, and substantial condemnation," and "that to salute the name of Mary in this fashion is to profess with certainty and fullness the adorable mystery of redemption."¹⁵

We shall explain later on, how Marian spirituality holds us within the confines of a true spirituality, shielding us, even as in the realm of the theologians, from illusions and errors which would lead us astray.

THE MAGNIFICAT: SONG OF TRIUMPH

Before Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, the Blessed Virgin was enlightened for an instant by the Archangel Gabriel; then under the continuous in-

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spiration of the Holy Ghost she grasped, with a clarity beyond the shadow of a doubt, even as the prophets of old, the significance of the work she was destined to accomplish. Paganism, pagan civilization would collapse. Upon its ruins, and with the beautiful remnants of its ruins, Christian civilization would arise. The architecture of the universe, so to speak, would be reversed.

The mercy of God extends from generation unto generation to them that fear him.

He hath shown might in his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble.

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent away empty. (Luke, ii: 50-53).

Moreover, this design was foreseen. Some day, the pagan Tower of Babel would crumble into dust, for God is faithful to his promises:

He hath received Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy:

As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." (Luke, i: 54-55).

Thus, it came to pass that at the same hour when the reversal of ancient customs and human values began, the Blessed Virgin, inspired by the Holy Ghost, poured forth her *Magnificat*. In that song she outlined the Sermon on the Mount and the whole Gospel message. No longer would a man's true greatness be measured by the established norms of antiquity, by external things, those superficialities of life: riches, power, physical prowess, prestige,

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and influence. The measure of man's true value would henceforth be the measure of the inner man, the person of the man, his mind, the quality of his soul, the clarity of the image of God within him, and the measure of his degree of sanctifying grace. Evaluated by these standards, personal greatness would bring about the suppression of all forms of tyranny and slavery; the cessation of the exploitation of man by man, and of the weak by the strong.

Moreover, this victory, one of the most stupendous ever imagined, would be the work of the Blessed Virgin. It was, in fact, the victory of which the Archangel Gabriel had spoken at the moment of the Annunciation:

"Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.

Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord shall give unto him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever.

And of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke, i: 30-33).

Because Mary has found grace with God, she has been chosen to establish the eternal kingdom. She reveals her mission as well as her blessings to Elizabeth on the occasion of her visit:

. . . . My soul doth magnify the Lord.

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

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Because he that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is his name. (Luke, i: 46-49).

The extraordinary action commencing at that time is performed not only by Mary but in Mary. The bond that unites her as agent with the Cause of all good, the All-Powerful, is not accidental or transitory, it is vital and everlasting; because it is the human generation of the Word. The Virgin Mary sang her hymn, lost, as it were, in the ecstasy of heaven, while on earth there was immediate confirmation given to her prophetic words. At the sound of her voice, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried aloud:

... As soon as the voice of salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord. (Luke, i: 44-45).

At that time the reign of Mary was inaugurated. Through Mary, Saint John is sanctified in the womb of his mother and chosen to be the precursor of the Savior.¹⁶ Inspired by the Holy Ghost, Elizabeth speaks truly when she attributes the advent of the New Era to her cousin Mary:

Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke, i: 42-43).

If the Annunciation be the heavenly prologue to the drama of the Redemption, then the Visitation is its opening scene. Catholic Action is but the con-

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tinuation—step by step—of Mary's part in that drama. Its work, as sketched in the *Magnificat*, proposes the continuous re-establishment of the Christian Order always somewhere menaced; for the Christian Order—high-lighted clearly in the *Magnificat*—consists in the destruction of an ever reviving paganism, a paganism which is the combined attempts of the proud against the poor in spirit, against the humble of heart, against those thirsting for justice and charity.¹⁷

MARY VICTORIOUS AT BETHLEHEM

The birth of Jesus disturbed the world no more than did His Incarnation. The three Magi from the Orient, of course, and certain shepherds who had received the announcement from Heaven, learned that the King of the Jews had just been born. Not any more than the breeze disturbs the waters of the sea did these visitors at the cave of Bethlehem disturb the whirl of world activities. After this apparently inconsequential event, only the kings and their retinue would be noticed passing along the village street. Jesus remains hidden.

The Blessed Virgin, on the contrary, manifests her presence. The Gospel introduces her. She continues to force Satan to retreat and to precipitate his plunge into the abyss of Hell.

By her action this Christmas day, the barriers which the pagan world had raised between mankind and God and to which Saint Paul later alludes began to crumble. Of course, Jesus must shed His

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blood to confirm the unity of peoples and races, but before that complete reconciliation Mary begins her work.

Two types of persons, through heavenly inspiration, come to the crib as the first-chosen of the Kingdom. They are those whom pagan civilization and the Jewish religion rejected; the shepherds, who represent the humble who have been exalted; the Magi, who represent the Gentiles whom Christ will call. Neither Roman emperors nor the Pharisees of the Synagogue were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. The mighty have already been put down and those of low degree exalted. The Blessed Virgin, Queen of angels and men, receives at court the poor and distressed to whom she has sung of the advent of the Savior. The powerful of the earth leave with empty hands—*he sent the rich away empty*; but to men of good will, Mary gives the Infinite, New-born God, the King of Creation—*he filled the hungry with good things*. Is it not her privilege to introduce to her Son whomsoever she chooses? It is she of whom one must ask for Jesus, and it is she who will respond to this request. So it is that through Mary all human barriers are broken down.

So it shall always be. To think of Christ as a Child who obeys the maternal authority of the Virgin Mary is more within the human grasp than to look only at Christ Himself and in the bosom of God the Father. The human sequence of the Redemption as written in the Gospel presents the Savior to us as the Son of Mary. It is, therefore, the Mother at

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this particular time of her Son's life whom we must contemplate and imitate.

Yes, with the Virgin Mother, we have to prolong the Incarnation. This is a stupendous task. It consists above all in uniting all that sinful men have separated. As Apostles of Catholic Action, we must cut to the quick the divisions which Mary wished to destroy by the Incarnation of the Word. We are the members of only one Mystical Body, that of Christ; and the workers in only one Temple, that of the Holy Spirit. We must, therefore, by Catholic Action, continue the action of Mary. Does not Saint Paul provide us our most eloquent example in this matter?

THE CIRCUMCISION: A VICTORY OF MARY

One is amazed that in so short a period of time—between the Annunciation and the Nativity—Mary should have accomplished so much, should have brought to fruition so many important matters. *He who is mighty hath done great things to me.* We are, however, only at the beginning of her great offensive against Satan. The mysteries of the Circumcision, the Purification, and of the Presentation on the eighth day after the birth of the Child, provided still other decisive occasions wherein the Mother won back a part of the Kingdom of God.

Indeed, she begins officially her unique function as Mediatrix for humanity. Presenting and containing within her, so to speak, the whole future Church, behold her here as one who liturgically and solemnly, before the priest of the law, offers to God her Son,

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the Christ, as ransom for the sins of humanity! What more simple than an act of oblation? Yet, because of the circumstances in which one meets Mary, the Gospel records few actions as significant as hers on this occasion.

The Circumcision and the Purification were not merely two acts of devotion; they were two acts of obedience to the law of Moses. (*Luke, ii: 21-22*). In each instance, Mary with Jesus—for we must not forget that Jesus is hidden in Mary, that He directs her and pledges His own authority each time His mother takes the initiative—links the Old with the New Testament. She authenticates the divine origin of Scripture; she confirms the tradition of the Bible; she recognizes the dependence of the Word Incarnate on the Law. God has dwelt among us in a certain sense from the beginning of the world. At the time of Augustus, the Word was made flesh, He took upon Himself human nature; but the Word of God was already incarnate, so to speak, in the inspired writings, the Bible. There is a continuity, a passing of the symbol in which reality is enveloped, to the reality itself that unfolds the symbol. Mary here recommends that we have confidence in Holy Scripture—nor is this the first time in her life that she has done so.

The Bible serves as an impregnable rampart against the insidious attacks of the infernal deceiver. When Our Lord Jesus Christ was tempted by the devil in the desert, He had recourse to the Bible, as His defense against the fallacies of Satan. Let us, as Militants, do likewise.

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Mary gives us still another example of obedience to the Law. There is all the more reason to look upon her docility as an intended example for us, inasmuch as both her Son and she herself were infinitely above the Law of Moses. If they submit to the Law they do it in our name, representing us, because of their union of interests with us, and in order to show us our duty.

When Mary carries her Son to the Temple in order that He may receive the seal of the Alliance, she performs a truly extraordinary deed. The Epistle to the Galatians explains it to us.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law; That He might redeem them who were under the law:

That we might receive the adoption of Sons.

(Galatians, iv: 4)

By the circumcision the Messiah accepted the yoke of the Law. That religious ceremony signified that Christ was truly one of us, or more precisely, one of the nation of the Israelites. The Savior, since He was an exceptional being, incorporated Himself with the people, mixed with the crowd, took upon Himself all the suffering, all the miseries of the group. As later on He becomes the Bread of our souls, it is not irreverent to compare His becoming One with His associates to the Divine Leaven. The woman chosen to mold the new bread of which Christ is the leaven is Mary.

Then would come to pass the supernatural elevation of human nature. Himself subject to the Law,

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Christ will deliver us from the maledictions which the Law imposes upon transgressors and will free us from a spirit of bondage. No longer children of Abraham He will make us children of God. He took upon Himself the expiation of sin in order to communicate to us *Justice*. "O admirable exchange." ¹⁸

THE PURIFICATION

The mystery of the purification of Mary contains the same divine teachings, although veiled. Mary was not only dispensed but exempt from all legal observance. She, who was the immaculate Virgin and who remained a virgin after she had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, had excellent reasons for not submitting to the purification ceremony of ordinary mothers. Nevertheless, as the equal of the most lowly and the most unworthy, Mary knelt down in the Women's Court of the temple and gave to the priest two turtle doves to be immolated in reparation for legal defilement. Apparently, she returned justified by the gift which she had offered and the prescribed prayer which the priest recited over her. Actually, her obedience, her humility, and her fidelity in keeping the secret of the presence of the Word merited for her an extraordinary increase of grace. While recognizing here the characteristics of Mary's action one concludes that these same characteristics must be the distinguishing qualities of Catholic Action. Lay apostles do not form a revolutionary party nor even a party of the opposition, but a chosen group of exem-

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plary citizens. Just as Mary, despite her privileges, is the most perfect of the Israelites, so must the apostles of Catholic Action because of their Christian convictions prove that they are models of civic and of national life.

Mary allowed Jesus to be circumcised, as were the other male children of her country; in like manner, she herself submitted to the ceremony of Purification, as did other mothers of Judea. She desires to give good example, as we have seen, but especially to include herself in the living unity of the nation through which humanity would receive the fulfillment of the Promises of Redemption.

To lay apostles, therefore, Mary's order is given: we are to integrate ourselves with the lives of our people, to mingle with them, to make ourselves one with all, even though some ill-informed privileged souls tend to hold aloof from the miseries of the world. Certainly, one need not be concerned about losing his initiative and independence since Mary makes it clear that the leaven must remain hidden and that thus hidden, it will transform the dough into life-giving bread. We must live "subjects of the Law in order to redeem those who are under the Law and to communicate to them the adoption of the children of God." (*Gal., iv: 4-5*) One must incorporate himself in order to be the soul of the body one quickens; in order to combat the principles of death, and to vivify the body of the true life; such is the direction which the Holy Virgin here proposes.

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JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

In the same obedient spirit, Mary presents Jesus in the Temple. Here still more than at the Circumcision, she represents the Church, ministering in its priestly function. In time to come, when priests shall say at the Mass: "Hoc est corpus meum."—"This is my Body."—"Hic est calix sanguinis mei."—"This is the chalice of my Blood," they will repeat Mary's offering.

The *Epistle to the Hebrews* reveals to us that Christ, by coming into the world, offered Himself to His Father in place of all ancient victims. The mystery of the Presentation shows Mary officially associated on the one hand, with this oblation of the Son of God, and on the other hand, with that of all humanity. She assumes her role of Mediatrix. In the name of humanity she gives her Son as the price of ransom, as a pledge of grace and of glory, as the Lamb that bears the sins of the world and whose life will be the nourishment of the world. At the same time, Mary gives herself as Mother, teacher, advocate and dispenser of the treasures of her Son. She pledges herself to serve humanity in these capacities with unceasing charity. It is in this sense that Saint Bernardine of Siena interprets the sentiments of Mary at the Presentation.¹⁹

Now at that moment that the Blessed Virgin offered her Son Jesus to His heavenly Father, Simon, a just and God-fearing man approached Mary, that woman of the people who as yet had revealed no evidence of her great dignity, and he said to her:

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Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted;

And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed. (Luke, ii: 34-35).

Words eternally just, the truth of which daily life confirms!

Necessarily, Christ divides men into two camps: those who are with Him and those who are against Him: those who refuse to make a profession of faith; those who will not enter into the light of Christ remain in darkness. One can always tell how an individual regards Truth, (that is, God), even though the person himself does not want to think about Truth.

The Child was set for a sign of division and at the same time a sign of contradiction; for whoever does not love Truth, hates it. Christ has indeed been loved by some and hated by others.

Hate, more violent than love, will victimize the Savior; then the soul of His Mother will be rent by the death blows inflicted on her Son.

The hour of the Passion is still remote: for the time being, Mary concerns herself with the task of bringing her will into more complete accord with that of her Son and her God. It is only to her, the mother, that the aged Simeon addresses himself; he speaks about Jesus, not to Him. And Jesus comports Himself as if He were no more than the child of Mary. The Blessed Virgin, on the contrary, fills the scene with her presence. Undoubtedly, the prophecy

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of Simeon tore the heart of the Mother, but it did not surprise her; for from the first moment of her motherhood, she understood that she had been chosen as the chief participant in that terrible struggle which would be waged around the Word Incarnate. If Christ must suffer, die, and rise again from the dead, she would be the first after Him to suffer, to die, and to be restored to life again. And all the elect will follow her. It is by following Mary that men shall be reunited with Christ immolated.

Catholic Action does not establish a state of privilege for those who practice it; nor does it insure honor or human happiness. The Blessed Virgin teaches us that it is a call to Christian endurance. One becomes incorporated with Jesus Christ Crucified. We become the brothers of Christ as Mary became His Mother. All of us inasmuch as we have been incorporated with Him and insofar as we share His life, are called to suffer because He suffered, in Him, with Him and for Him.

Could it be that we regard Catholic Action as an opportunity to direct others, or to dominate them? Do we perhaps see in it only an opportunity for social leadership? In reality, God within us, and calling us, asks us to follow Christ, to compassionate Him, that is to say, to suffer with Him for the sins of the many. "Your soul a sword shall pierce." That is the question which we must put to the militant leader: "Can you drink this chalice?"

But could we trust Him, could we comprehend Him, could we have the courage to say, "Yes," if it were not for the fact that Mary, the first and most

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privileged of creatures had herself generously followed the royal way of the Cross?

VICTORIES AT NAZARETH

As He advanced in age and wisdom, Jesus seemed to immerse Himself more and more in the shadows of the hidden life; for at Nazareth He spent thirty years in voluntary seclusion. Such a lack of activity on the part of God is enigmatic, but when the Evangelist tells us that Jesus "obeyed," he clarifies the whole situation. Jesus had in a way no separate, no individual existence at Nazareth. His hour had not yet come; it was Mary's hour.

Her maternal presence guarded the secret of the presence of the Incarnate Word. In the role she plays through the ages even up to now she has been ever equally active. But the devil has no reason to enjoy the seeming inactivity of Jesus; Satan's power over souls has been decreasing continually.

Very early in the life of her son Jesus, Mary concentrated on His education. Had Jesus not willed to be reared by His Mother, He would not have come into the world after the manner of other children. To Mary, therefore, God had assigned the education of Jesus as her special duty.

This instruction of Jesus was Mary's sublime responsibility; yet the Child-God had not been confided to the school of Mary for his own sake, that His ignorance might be dispelled; but for our sakes, that we might be enlightened. It was necessary that we be advised as to the teacher of God's choice in the vital work of the education of the children of God.

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Shall not the method followed by Christ, who is the Way, be the method followed by the members of Christ? Is it not clear that the Word Incarnate, Who had no need of lessons, but Who Himself became the pupil of Mary, has pointed out to mankind the ideal educator of mankind? Later on we shall study in detail the teachings of Mary; it suffices to have called attention here to one of the significant features of the mystery of Nazareth.

There is another. At that time Mary laid down many fundamental principles of Catholic Action. For example, she revealed fully one part of God's plan: it is that the work of Catholic Action demands trained workers—Apostles; we may even say that it demands an extended period of formation if we have grasped the significance of Nazareth. Mary prepared Jesus for His mission over a long period of time.

Perhaps apostles who do not live under the influence of Mary's presence give little heed to the lessons of Nazareth; perhaps some think slightly of their personal spiritual life and its formation by Mary; they do not see the necessity of a serious, deep, and extensive preparation for the work of Catholic Action. At Nazareth the Blessed Virgin enlightens them. She establishes the fact that a period of preparation, a novitiate,—I would even say a Mary-directed novitiate—is necessary for the lay apostolate just as it is necessary for the religious and the priestly apostolate.

Undoubtedly it may not be always possible or even useful, to confine oneself first to a period of

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inactivity in order to train oneself for the active apostolate. In the midst of an apostolic life souls find opportunities to practice exalted and difficult virtue; but if the active worker for souls is not imbued with the spirit of the hidden life, he will soon recognize his inability to accomplish the work of God.

Again, Mary places education for family life at the basis of Christian living. The Christian family was consecrated in the sanctuary of Nazareth. Since that consecration, every family should be a reflection of Nazareth. Catholic Action must begin with the sanctification of families: first, the wife must be faithful to her home; the mother must prepare for her role of educator; the woman must become deeply Christian. Next, the child, as it is advancing in age and increasing in wisdom and in grace, must be submissive to his parents; he must receive from them his early physical, moral, and spiritual training. Such family life is the firm foundation of the Christian order which we as militants must work to establish successfully.

The notions that a child is independent, that youth must be prematurely emancipated from the control of its parents are contradictory to the evidence provided by the holy house at Nazareth. Furthermore, the Holy Family teaches us that the education of children must be founded on the authority of parents and the obedience of children. If the liberty of God was not curtailed nor lessened by his submission to human beings, why should that of

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God's creatures, modeling themselves on the Holy Family, be curtailed? To maintain these principles of education is one of the ends of Catholic Action.

At Nazareth, Mary emphasized the capital importance of the duties of one's state in life, considering that they took precedence over all other human duties. In so doing she definitely established a hierarchy among our diverse obligations. Neither Mary nor Jesus considered the apostolate more important than the duties of one's state in life. Nor do they impress us as being too much disturbed by the darkness in which blinded souls wander; rather, they act as if they recognize the fact that there is a time for the active life and likewise for the passive or hidden life. Time, all time, belongs to God and will have its reverberation in eternity.

Catholic Action follows the evangelical order. Even if there were not before us the example of Our Lord's public life, Catholic Action would recommend to its apostles fidelity to the duties of their respective states of life. But Catholic Action imitates, without marring it, the complete activity of the early Church which originally comprised only Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. All souls, therefore, must live with Jesus and like Jesus they must be hidden obediently in Mary before they enter upon external works of the active life.

The activity of Mary at Nazareth included many other elements which will serve to direct the apostolate of the Church in all ages. During that period of laborious and prayerful solitude, the Blessed

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Virgin resembles a great military leader, who being in charge of tactics, makes it a practice to give simple and effective directives on all occasions. Among these directives emanating from the center at Nazareth, there is none more important to us than that which brought about the institution of the religious life. The thirty years of hidden life have always been regarded by saints and by spiritual authorities as the figure of the religious life to be imitated at all times. In both (figure and reality) one finds the same general pattern: the same function, habits, retirement, union; the same virtues, the same inclination to live for God.

Certain souls less profound and more restless than others delude themselves to the point of believing that they as lay apostles mingling with the world are called to exercise above all, if not entirely, the function of the active life. They forget the method established by Mary. The Blessed Virgin, we repeat, has been inspired by Jesus who alone is the Lord. But God has wished that Jesus should live a hidden and dependent life at Nazareth and He gave the role of initiative to Mary and Joseph. We should conform ourselves to the will of God.

There is an affinity between Catholic Action and religious Congregations. Catholic Action, like a tree on which fruits ripen, lives because of the sap of its roots whence it draws its nourishment.²⁰ Religious Congregations furnish this sap in the prayers and sacrifices of religious men and women without which Catholic Action would wither. How many are the

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souls in whom the apostolate is but an overflow of the holiness and of unity with God acquired in the religious life?

There is, then, something heretical in the idea of an apostolate that would tear out of the Bible the pages of the hidden life of Our Lord and begin the Gospel narrative with the inauguration of His public life when He was thirty years old.

JESUS LOST IN THE TEMPLE

The loss of Jesus at the age of twelve, when He remained in the Temple without the knowledge of His Mother, broke the daily routine of the life of Jesus hidden in Mary. This episode offers excellent lessons to Catholic Action: Mary, the Mother, loses sight of her Son and experiences on that account an unbelievable sorrow; finding her Child after a search that lasted three days, she experiences a sense of complete bewilderment at His conduct; but, she unites her will to that of her Son and with all wounds healed, she resumes her daily duties.

Lay apostles sometimes lose sight of the presence of God or forget the fact of the all-pervading Providence of God in the march of events. At such times it seems to them as if things happen contrary to what they had expected by reason of their confidence, their merits, their prayers, and their sacrifices. God seems to have disappeared or even to be countenancing strange conditions in the Church. Even more. The Church itself, which is Christ living upon the earth, acts in certain circumstances as Christ did with

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respect to His parents; that is to say, the Church seems unmindful of the sufferings, the sorrows, and the so-called rights of the laity. Even the Holy Father, the representative of Christ, acts occasionally in a way incomprehensible to us.

At such times Mary illuminates the night that envelops these souls. Since Mary endured the loss of her Son, is there any reason that should exempt **THEM** from enduring a similar loss of Jesus? Since Christ busied Himself with the affairs of His Father without the cooperation of Mary, is there any reason why He should not manifest Himself within His kingdom without **THEIR** aid or even contrary to **THEIR** expectations? Since Mary admitted that she herself did not understand clearly how God was accomplishing His work, must **THEY** always understand? Since the Mother of God submitted to the will of God, why should **THEY** not submit with docility to that same Divine Will?

Catholic Action is a cooperation with the Virgin Mary. Christ does the work of His Father. We must follow Him, working with Him toward a successful issue. But to want God to think and act as we do, to want Him to subordinate His designs to ours is an illusion which Mary never had and one from which we must beg God to preserve us. Without Our Lady of Good Counsel how far astray we would be led! Our pride would like to foresee everything, to domineer over everyone, to regulate everything, to do everything. No, no; we must abandon ourselves to the Will of God; self-abandonment is necessary.

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THE PUBLIC LIFE

From the beginning of the public life of Christ, Mary retired to a secondary place; even the Apostles themselves stand out in bolder relief than does the figure of the Mother of God. With the public preaching of the Messiah there began the period of the life of Mary hidden in Jesus. We shall not stop to elaborate on this period of apparent retreat which was forced on Mary by the exigencies of circumstances. We are remarking, however, that from that moment of voluntary eclipse on the part of Mary, her action was still intimately associated with that of her Divine Son.

Up to that hour of the departure from Nazareth, Mary had strongly affirmed her faith in the true humanity of the Word. Afterwards, for three years, she worked by means of discreet instructions, to establish faith in the divinity of Christ. In this way she enters into the providential perspective. She spread that faith in the divinity of her Son, above all taking care to collaborate with Him only from afar. It would seem that her presence in the throng would be inappropriate, since she herself was a tangible proof and witness of the humanity of Jesus; and since Christ must needs manifest at that time His Messiahship and His eternal sonship. To introduce evidence of the human origin of Jesus would hinder the Jews, already too carnal-minded, from discerning the divine origin of that man so like his contemporaries in all things. "Do we not know his village, his home," they gloated in asking, "his trade, his parents?"

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In chapter six of Saint John's Gospel we read that when Christ was trying to convince the men of Capernaum that He Himself is the Bread descended from heaven, he encountered an almost insurmountable difficulty in getting those otherwise sensible men to acknowledge that the same person could be at one and the same time son of Mary and son of the heavenly Father, true man and true God. Mary realized that her appearance would furnish a pretext to the Jews to cavil against the Divinity and that by disappearing she would assure the success of the preaching of Jesus. In solitude she restrained her maternal curiosity, she prayed, she merited, and she united with her Divine Son in desiring the conversion of Mankind. In secret she responded to the charity of the heart of Jesus rebuffed by the ingratitude of many. There was at least one soul on earth who understood and appreciated the love of Christ for men: it was she whom none saw but of whom Jesus often thought—Mary.

Not infrequently Catholic Action also is obliged to efface itself and to act with very modest reserve in order not to spoil the work of God; for the transformations which the apostolate brings about have, even as Jesus Christ Himself, a two-fold origin: the one human and the other, divine; a human origin, inasmuch as they are the effects of human efforts; a divine, because they are brought about by grace without which they would be of no value.

Is not the human aspect of our good works only too apparent? With our apostolic charity, we mingle

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so much self-love, so much vain eagerness for human approbation, so much indiscretion, so much self-confidence that we are very likely to offend eyes which, but for all this too natural ostentatiousness, would be better able to see the action of grace.

Of the techniques of the apostolate, the Saints are the masters. Neither too much nor too little of the human appears as they work. Their followers recognise clearly the divine origin of their success. It is necessary that we, too, manifest in our apostolate the work of the Holy Spirit. *He must increase, and I must decrease.* (John, iii: 30) May the Blessed Virgin teach us this perfect procedure which she maintained with such admirable wisdom!

Moreover, Mary manifests a special concern for the faith of the people in the divinity of Christ, by inaugurating in accordance with the clearly indicated will of God, the era of Messianic miracles. A request, which gave the impression of being unexpected, precipitated the execution of the divine intentions at the Wedding of Cana.

The hour of the public manifestation (of Christ) had not yet, in the designs of God, been announced; that is why Christ would not Himself initiate the miracle. It was the silent supplication of His Mother, to whom He will refuse nothing, which caused Him to anticipate His time and in some way to interfere with the divine plan. Even as she waited for the response of her Son, Mary knew the answer. So sure was she that her request would be granted that she immediately, as if she had known the order beforehand, told the servants to obey the directions of her Son: "Do all that He shall say to you." ²¹

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This first miracle holds more interest for us as apostles inasmuch as it was performed at a wedding feast, in the presence of all the guests, and for pure charity, without ostentation and without any personal gain. In addition, it is a symbolic miracle; it prefigures the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Eucharist which are the most important elements in Christian life.

The physical changing of the water into wine prefigures the consecration of the wine in the chalice; it symbolises also the supernatural transformation of our souls into Christ. God, it seems, wishes to teach us that all supernatural gifts come to us through the ministry of the Blessed Virgin.

This initial call to faith in the Messiah is one of the first works in which God was pleased to make known the method He would follow in similar works. . . . By having His Mother present at every miraculous outpouring of grace God wished to show that supernatural work depends on Mary entirely, and that it will bear its best fruit in souls when Mary is present to facilitate its accomplishment.²²

Had the activities of Mary during the public life of Jesus been reported to us, perhaps we could have understood better the role which she secretly played among the disciples of Christ and among the Holy Women, that faithful group of women which remained intact up to the moment of the Resurrection under the influence of Mary's faith and love, while the group of Apostles was scattered. But on many occasions Mary's presence furnished Christ with an occasion to recall His divine origin: "Who are my Mother and my brothers?" Jesus asked, pointing to

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the people and designating them as souls of good will, He added, "Behold my Mother and my brothers; for whosoever does the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he is my brother, my sister, and my mother."

For us, through the clarity of the Christian dogma, we penetrate the depths and comprehend the full meaning of these words. Not human relationship alone united "His Mother" to Jesus, but in addition to the ties of blood there are those of the spirit. Because Jesus is God Incarnate and first-born of all men, He has communicated His own life to all redeemed souls, especially to Mary the Immaculate Virgin. All possess this life in common. These words, which seem to depreciate Mary, on the contrary, elevate her infinitely above her apparent dignity. Her maternity is not of a human order; it is divine in its expression: Christ. It is divine in its cause: the Holy Spirit. Through her sanctity and her union with the Holy Spirit, Mary first conceived the Word supernaturally, (*prius concepit mente*); then the Christ in the natural order. The virginity of Mary remains, although she becomes a mother and from it her maternity receives a new splendor.

"Blessed is the womb that bore Thee," cried a woman to Jesus, on one occasion, "and blessed are the paps which gave Thee suck." But Jesus, knowing very well that there is another beatitude in which His Mother surpassed all others answered, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it." (*Luke, xi: 27-28*)

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The liturgy on several Feasts of the Blessed Virgin and in her votive Mass recalls these passages of Scripture, which in a final analysis, show the divine maternity of the Mother of Jesus, as a work of grace.

Christ, then, proclaimed to the multitude that the Son of His Mother differed from the sons of other mothers in order that He might have with all souls a relationship more intimate than that forged by the bonds of marriage and of natural sonship; it was necessary that His Mother's Son be likewise the Son of God. Once again, the presence of Mary contributes to reveal the Son of God.

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF THE CHURCH IN MARY

The third period of Mary's action is as important and as decisive as are the first two. We have called this step the stage of "the hidden life of the Church in Mary." The Blessed Virgin again stands out in the picture nearest her Son, and, in a sense, alone with Him, opposing the Prince of Darkness, already conquered a hundred times!

During the Passion of Christ, while the faithless crowd demands His death; while the State condemns Him to the scourging and the crucifixion; while the Jewish religion condemns Him as a blasphemer; while the disciples take to flight, and one of the twelve betrays Him, the Blessed Virgin alone stands beside Him. She is needed there, for she is the only representative of the faith of man in God and their love for God.

Mary represents the Church; she is the entire

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Church. Later on, millions of faithful souls will comprise the Church; but during the Passion the Church is hidden in Mary; it is, so to speak, concealed in her maternal womb. Through Mary each of us was present on Calvary; by the agency of Mary we were taking part in the eternal drama of the Redemption. We were redeeming guilty humanity; we were redeeming ourselves; we were severing our alliance with Satan whom we were crushing; we were regaining in every sense our rights as children of God. Without doubt, it is in Jesus Christ that we were achieving all these definite victories. But this price of redemption we received from the hands of the Mother who gave us her Son. But more than that, the active part which humanity, and likewise, the Church had to have in that regaining of our divine rights Mary alone exercised on Calvary. She alone, as a mother, in the name of all unborn children, offered the Ransom and received the reward of salvation. All of us were active in our Mother Mary.

Mary's action on Calvary assumed gigantic proportions. During the centuries since that time, whenever Holy Church offers the sacrifice of the Mass, she draws from the infinite treasury of the merits of Christ; she showers redeeming graces on souls, minting, so to speak, the precious metal acquired through the death of Jesus; but whatever the Church does, she only imitates and perpetuates through the ages the solemn act of the Mother of God on Calvary.

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When the priest offers the Holy Sacrifice, the memorial of the passion, it is the Church, which by the hands of the priest, offers Jesus Christ; for the Church is the continuation of Mary, and the oblation of the Church reproduces the oblation offered by Mary on Calvary. The sacerdotal action of the Church is the memorial of the sacerdotal action of Mary. Truly, as all supernatural good flows from the priesthood of Jesus Christ, so does it likewise flow from her who alone has given us priest and victim, and who alone offered Him on that day when He was accomplishing once and for all His bloody sacrifice. The infinite value of that first sacrifice offered by Mary must enrich every Mass. What we say about the Mass is equally true of all the actions of Holy Church. Hidden in Mary, the Church performs through Mary all the functions which were vested in her as cooperator with Christ in His work of redemption. In the course of centuries, the Church has only to repeat these functions constantly in order to distribute to all generations the benefactions of Mary's victory.

In this way do we see Mary inaugurate through her offering of Christ on Calvary, not only the apostolate of the laity, but also that of the priesthood, as she had inaugurated, through her "Fiat," the Incarnation of the Word, and through the miracle of Cana, the public manifestation of the Divinity of Christ. He who recalls the spiritual narrative of the Passion will be dependent upon the Virgin Mary in everything. May we never forget the life-sources of the Church!

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MARY: THE CO-REDEMPTRIX

When Mary offered her Son, she also offered herself; while she immolated her own Child, she likewise immolated herself. Our Lady will ever be Our Lady of Sorrows. Holy Mother the Church, which lives in Mary, is obligated through her to walk in the way of suffering. With Mary, who bore her, so to speak, she is associated in the tragic destiny of the Crucified and she accepts the imprint of His wounds forever. Like Mary, the Church, too, bears its stigmata; the Church, too, can be called Our Lady of Sorrows.

Without the Virgin Mary, those souls whom Jesus by His death had redeemed might not have known how to regard the death of Jesus. Should their attitude be that of the victorious? Of the dead brought back to life? Or the attitude of the criminal who has just learned the gravity of his crimes? Should they regard themselves as sons of Adam roused out of their deluded blindness? Were they murderers, conscious of having brought death not only to their own souls, but also to Christ? How would God wish them to feel? Triumphant, or humiliated?

Certain heretics have deceived themselves. How many of us, under the pretext that Christ's death has restored us to the divine sonship, have been tempted to regard Christ only as the glorified Christ and not as the crucified Christ? Those of the first group who do not bear in their souls, in their hearts, and even in their bodies the death of Jesus Christ cause Catholic Action to deviate from its proper course. The insignia

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of true apostles are the invisible stigmata which the Blood of Christ imprints on their souls even as it blots out their sins.

This theology and its universal application in the Church comes directly from Mary; for the Mother of God was the living theology of the Church before the doctors had formulated the first outlines of dogma. It sufficed to contemplate Mary in order to know how to act with respect to Christ who died for men. The compassionate understanding of the Mother of Sorrows offers an unerring rule of Christian spirituality. This truth is as certain as the truth that the Blessed Virgin was immaculate and that she was likewise the only human being who had never offended God. Although the Virgin Mother had never participated in sin which caused the suffering and expiation of Jesus, nevertheless, she shared in His sorrow and His death.

Mary's action, in reality, was but the action of Jesus in her. We do not see there two distinct nor even similar actions, but one, a unique action, the first Cause of which was the Word Incarnate; the second, or the co-principal being the Mother of this Word Incarnate. Humanity was redeemed first by Jesus, but at the same time, it was redeemed through the ministry of the Immaculate One morally crucified with Jesus. Together, Mother and Son suffered; together they died because together they shared the guilt of mankind, and together they won the definitive victory over Satan.

From this angle, also, Catholic Action may be regarded as the extension of Mary's action. Without

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a doubt it is through the zeal of apostles that the Blood of Jesus Christ must be made to flow abundantly over souls still pagan or disfigured by sin. But this wide-spread diffusion of the Blood of Christ through their instrumentality represents only the redemptive role of Christ and does not include the role of humanity. Humanity can sustain its role by undergoing the Passion in its turn. But mankind as a whole ignores the truth of the necessity of cooperation through suffering. For that reason humanity can redeem itself only through a select group, the Apostles. Just as Mary represented the Church on Calvary, so have apostles been chosen to represent the Church on the Calvary of each century. Their actions must be performed in union with Christ crucified. Jesus asks of them what He had first asked of His Mother—that they carry with Him the weight of the sins of the world, that is to say, of their own world; and that they bear also the weight of redemptive sorrows. From this union there results a spirituality and a psychology which nature alone does not give to apostles.

One hears occasionally the comment that there is no apostolate except that of the specialized movements; yet there is none so rash as to maintain that the apostolate of prayer and suffering does not contribute to the salvation of souls. No sincere Catholic would claim that his zeal is sufficient to convert souls without the redeeming help of the suffering, the temptations, the mortifications, and the agonies of thousands of Christians nailed to the Cross. Catholic

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Action does not imply only the reform of society; it is first of all a reparation for the sins of society; for one does not build upon sin but on the wood of the Cross. The saintly Sister Mary of the Incarnation relates that she saw in ecstasy "a new city and therein a building of marvelous grandeur—— all that I could see was that this building was wholly constructed, not of stones, but of persons crucified. Each held the cross to which he was attached, some being fastened only as high as the knees; others, somewhat further up, and still others completely so. But only these last, whose bodies were entirely crucified, bore their crosses patiently. So ravishing and so beautiful was the sight that I could not take my eyes away from it. Since that time, the remembrance of that vision continues to impress me deeply and to give me a great love of the Cross." ²³

It is precisely a work of this sort which should engage lay apostles. When one contemplates Mary, who on Calvary comprised the entire co-redeeming Church, who endured the same sorrows as her Son, one cannot conceive a Catholic Church that would wish to save the world without participating in the Passion of Jesus. The Church must be suffering with the Son.

WITH JESUS CRUCIFIED

The sufferings of Jesus were the immediate causes of the sufferings of Mary. Truly, one cannot conceive how Mary could experience sorrows other than those of maternal love, since she was free from original sin and its consequences. If Jesus had not been

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a victim of persecution, her happiness would have been complete. But since her Son had chosen through obedience the most painful existence, her own compassion had to be almost infinite. The Passion of the Son necessarily called for the compassion of the Mother. However, one need not seek reasons for Mary's mental anguish in psychological fatality, but in the design of God. When the heavenly Father gave a mother to the Word Incarnate, He willed all the consequences of that maternity, and the first of these was the joint endurance of the Passion by Jesus and Mary.

When adopting us as members of Christ's mystical Body and as children of the Virgin in Christ, the heavenly Father also willed that as a consequence of our adoption, we also share the Passion. Members of the crucified Christ, we must suffer because of Jesus and in Jesus, as His Mother and our Mother did. We also were predestined to suffering.

In the apostolate perhaps we are too much inclined to cherish only the sufferings which cause us difficulties in our enterprises, but which lead us to definite victories. Through these difficulties we seek a new uplift of our personality. But gratuitous sufferings, losses, defeats, deprivations without compensations, criminal scourgings, the bare cross do not appear to us the best instruments of our zeal. We flee from these because they are apparently sterile. How unlike Mary we are!

Like the Holy Virgin, we should love suffering for the unique reason that it assimilates us to Jesus Crucified. The redemption of souls does not result

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from our sufferings nor our efforts but from the Passion of Christ. What is efficacious and salutary in Catholic Action is suffering with Jesus and in Jesus in order to cooperate with Him. What we need is concentration on our Leader, Mary! We shall always experience great difficulty when we try to realize that salvation comes from Jesus and not from ourselves; from His Cross not from ours, and consequently, that Catholic Action is only a cooperation with Jesus Crucified.

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (I, Cor., ii: 2.)

Apostles who consider the Virgin Mother as their Queen run less risk of forgetting this essential law of the apostolate.

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

We have reached the culminating moment of that part of the Holy Virgin's life which we have called the hidden life of the Church in Mary. It is a solemn hour—an hour as important as that of the Incarnation of the Word. It behooves us to meditate thereon on bended knees.

The Church, which had been begotten by Mary only, is, so to speak, about to be born, as a child from the womb of the Mother of Jesus. At Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to the mortal body of the Son of God; on Calvary, she brought forth His Mystical Body, the Church. From the height of the Cross, Christ, at the moment of His death, performed that

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miracle which was for Him even then like a resurrection of His Body. Two-fold in effect, His miracle operated both in Mary and in Saint John; in Mary, it extended her maternity to all men redeemed by Jesus; simultaneously, it made of Saint John the first child of the Church, the child who would succeed Jesus Christ Himself. Indicating His Mother, Jesus said, in effect, "Behold your Mother;" and to Mary, indicating His disciple, "Behold your son." (*John, xix: 26-27*)

From this time forward the Church began to have a distinct existence. It comprised both John and Mary: John as the spiritual child; Mary as the Mother of that child. As Jesus was born of the Virgin by the power of the Holy Ghost, so the Church too was born of the Virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. At the moment that the Blessed Virgin brought forth Christ, the Church through the Virgin engendered the faithful also, who are Christ's Mystical Body. The Church still remains hidden in Mary because, whether it be regarded as Mary chiefly, or as John, it was born of her maternity in obscurity and silence. Christ, therefore, when dying, brought about the mystical constitution of the Church by making the distinction between Mother and son, Mary and John. We are not indulging here in colorful writing, poetry or symbolism. We are stating facts. Expiring on the Cross, Jesus completed his divine work by His last creation, more important than His preceding ones.

Is not the efficacy of all pronouncements of the

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Divine Word equally extraordinary?

Certain Fathers of the Church have rightly compared these last words of Jesus: "Behold thy son; behold thy mother" to those of the Eucharistic consecration: "This is My Body . . . This is My Blood." Through the latter, bread is changed into the Body of Christ; His Body becomes nourishment; and the communicants partaking of this Bread, enter into the deeper union of the Mystical Body of Christ; through the former, Saint John becomes the Church, that is to say, Christ and humanity in one Mystical Body; and Mary becomes the mother of that Church, that is to say, the mother of the Mystical Body.²⁴ In each case, there is a supernatural extension and expansion of nature. In the latter, through the transubstantiation, the Body of Jesus is no longer only the Body of a Man, but nourishment and the interior principle of a living unity for all mankind. In the former, through the transfiguration of Saint John and of Mary, the Mother of God is no longer solely the Mother of Jesus, but through Saint John, she is the mother of all men who have been made one with Christ.

Undoubtedly, as in all supernatural economy, the human nature of John and of Mary remained what it was. The maternity and the sonship of which Jesus spoke are not according to the flesh. It is equally certain that John and all men had been engendered by Mary at the Annunciation in the same sense in which it is said that Christ contained in Himself all humanity. But on Calvary these mysteries were partly revealed. The Church, hidden until

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then, appeared in its first organic development. There is a visible increase of the work of grace. As in spring time after rain and sunshine, the buds burst forth and flowers bloom, so on Calvary, humanity blossoms on the stem of Jesse, watered by the Blood of Christ. The Church (in the person of Saint John) takes a concrete form in the order of grace, that of a child of the Mother of God.

The kingdom of God having come, it advances further and further, through Mary, pursuing its victorious march; the devil recoils in defeat. Lucifer, perhaps, had felt himself defeated only in the exceptional case of the Crucified One, that Son of Mary and Joseph. But, with those words, "Behold thy son; behold thy mother," his doom was sealed. Since all mankind had become, like Jesus, the child of the virgin, he would continue to be beaten to the ground by all humanity, the race of the woman. The race of the woman would crush his head. What a terrifying surprise: "Principalities and Powers are despoiled and taken captive by the conquerors." (*Col., ii: 14-15*)

According to the early Fathers of the Church, it was in order to recall this divine plan that Jesus on this occasion used the word "woman" ²⁵ a word which indicated the accomplishment of the promises recorded in the Book of Genesis and the rebirth of humanity from the womb of the New Eve. "Just as Jesus Christ called himself the Son of Man, so He gives to the Virgin, His mother, the name of woman in order to present her as the woman through whom

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the evil caused by the first woman would have to be repaired.²⁶

MARY'S LOVE FOR MEN

With the spiritual birth of the Church in the person of Saint John, the mystical life of Christ began. Mary and the Church would live thereafter in the same relationship as did Mary and Jesus; the same intimate feelings and the same Providential laws would unite them until the end of time. Before the coming of the Holy Ghost, one could still consider the Church as hidden in Mary. Like the child in the womb of its mother, the Church is inactive; it is Mary who acts. She acts effectively, while awaiting the rapid and prodigious extension of the Church in the world; she sows in men the seed of faith in the Resurrection; she gathers the disciples together in the Cenacle after the Ascension; she teaches them the meaning of the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, and she prepares them to receive the Holy Spirit. Tremendous work, prelude of her eternal mediation!

Even more than her works, one may emphasize the change effected in the heart of Mary at the moment of the death of Christ. When Jesus said, "Woman behold thy Son," He filled His Mother's heart with such an influx of grace that the same maternal love which she had for Him became a maternal love for all mankind. Her compassion for the sufferings of Jesus became a universal compassion for all the miseries of the world. The pity which the horrible Passion of Jesus aroused in her became an

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unlimited mercy toward the sins of men. John, substituting for Jesus Christ, became from that moment for Mary all that Jesus was.

Each of us, then, since John represented each of us, will be cherished by the Mother of Jesus as Jesus Himself was cherished. What mother would not tenderly adopt the comrade in arms whom her own slain Son had saved from death? Now, for the Blessed Virgin, we are souls regenerated by the Blood of Christ; furthermore, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, we comprise the Mystical Body of Christ, and consequently, we are the Christ who lives and continues to live in this world. The grace of charity which Mary received on Calvary transformed her maternal heart to such a degree that men can rely upon her love as did Jesus Himself. From this consideration there follows this spiritual doctrine: One must look upon the Blessed Virgin as Jesus Himself regarded His Mother. This spirit of filial love toward Mary is one of the graces which we receive at Baptism together with the Faith, since Baptism incorporates us with her Son Jesus. One may say, too that among Christians devotion to the Blessed Virgin is "instinctive and congenital."²⁷ Indifference toward the Blessed Virgin appears to be an immeasurable error and a gross ingratitude.

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

With the descent of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost, there began the last phase of Mary's Action: *the life of Mary hidden in the Church*. After the cursory

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examination of Scripture which we have made, we see clearly the continuity of God's design. Wherever a new creation in the supernatural life is in process, Mary is there; for God wished that humanity should prepare itself, so to speak, for God Himself, through the virginal generation of the Word Incarnate. Each time there is a fresh progression of that divine life the Virgin is present in order that that divine life may come to us in a human way understandable by means of the Incarnation. This consideration makes it clear that the Holy Spirit must have descended upon the Apostles as He had first descended upon the humanity of Christ; through the mediation of Mary. The *Acts of the Apostles* (i: 14) show us the Holy Virgin at prayer in the midst of the Apostles, and calling down upon the newly born Church the fullness of the Paraclete, the crowning gift of Christ.²⁸ Especially attracted by her fervor and sanctity, the Holy Spirit descended, for her sake, and upon her first of all, filling her with His grace; and through Mary, He poured His love into the heart of each Apostle.

The Church was now prepared to act and go forth from the Cenacle and manifest itself openly—its first appearance on the stage of this world. The Virgin, however, did not cease to belong to the Church. More than ever she was the Mother-Church, the fruitful Church, its very foundation. Because of this motherhood and in order that Mary might fulfill her role of mother perfectly, the Holy Spirit, while showering His gifts upon the Apostles, bestowed them infinitely more upon Mary. He in-

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creased more and more her power of giving spiritual birth to all the human brothers of her First-born.

In addition, as appropriate for a mother, He communicated to her in superabundance the "charisma" and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Of these graces the disciples received only a share. But Mary needed these graces for the perfect accomplishment of her role as educator of her children. Mary received, for example, the seven gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the gift of miracles, the discernment of spirits; prophecy, that is words of wisdom, and knowledge; the power of healing, et cetera.²⁹ And all these for our benefit!

According to the writing of M. Olier, "Mary" received the Holy Spirit, "not in a measure, but in plenitude."³⁰ Jesus Christ Himself animated her fully. He communicated to her all that He is, He gave her more of Himself than He gave to all other creatures, more than He gave to the whole Church. The Apostle Saint Peter, whom Jesus Christ chose as the visible head of His Mystical Body, although filled with the spirit of His Master at the Cenacle, received only the portion of that divine life becoming his dignity as Head. The other Apostles, who also received the first fruits of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, did so only according to the measure which His wisdom and His love desired to give each one. But not in this way did Jesus give Himself to Mary. Dwelling in her in the plenitude of His love, Our Lord kept back nothing, but gave her all of Himself that she could receive. Just as God the Father gave to His Son all that He was in Himself and that was communicable,

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so the Son gave all to Mary and in order to work through her all that He desired, He made her the receptacle of His riches in order that she might distribute them again to the entire Church.”³¹

THE CHURCH AND MARY

One does not find the term “Church” in use before the descent of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost; instead, there is mention of Jesus and Mary. But after leaving the Cenacle, the Church assumes such importance in the eyes of the faithful Christians that they talked about the visible Church more than of anything else. In fact, Mary lived only a life hidden in the Church. All of which explains the expressions that we are “of the Church” and “in the Church;” that the Church is our Mother; that the Church gives us life, graces, and divine sonship; that Catholic Action is the action of the Church in us and through us. These assertions are all true.

But, what is the Church? If we do not mean that Jesus and Mary comprise the Church, then the word “church” is an abstraction. If, on the contrary, we mean by the Church a living, fruitful reality, then the word “church” designates concretely Jesus and Mary, the Mystical Body of Jesus, child of His mother, Mary.

Whatever good we attribute to the Church must in reality revert to Jesus and Mary. The Church has two aspects: an aspect of life and an aspect of fecundity. Christ is its life; the fecundity of this life is the Mother of Christ or Christ living in His Mother. Not

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that the Mother of Christ could conceive of herself; she does so by the power of the Holy Spirit. But for the Church, and for every soul, as for the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit operates through Mary's bosom.

The Fathers of the Church, moreover, have persistently declared that the visible Church "imitates Mary" hidden in the visible Church. "Therefore if the Church brings forth members of Christ, she is most like Mary."³² Because it, (the Church), is at the same time Jesus and Mary, it is a mother and a virgin like the Mother of Jesus. If, therefore, she bears the members of Christ, she is most like Mary, declares Saint Augustine elsewhere.³³ Constantly, from the earliest centuries, the Church has been called, like Mary, the Virgin Mother.³⁴

Inversely, as happens in the case of realities included in one another, the Mother of God is given the name of Church. Speaking of Mary, Manes says, "This Virgin so chaste, this Church so immaculate." Everywhere, in painting,³⁵ in architecture,³⁶ and in poetry³⁷ Mary and the Church are identified by the same terms and symbols so as to be indistinguishable.³⁸

Patristic literature abounds in examples. The writings of Saint Fulgence, Peter Chrysologus, Caesar of Arles, Isadore, Ambrose and Augustine often furnish them. They can be found in many other records of Tradition.³⁹ The Greek Fathers first and, following their example, many later commentators have applied the same Scriptural texts to both the Church and Mary. For example, the Woman in

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the struggle between the dragon and the woman, described in the Apocalypse, is the Church. But, because the Church presupposes Mary; because it has no children except those given it by Mary; because it, but in a lesser degree than Mary, "is clothed with the sun and crowned with twelve stars;" because, "the male child who governs with a scepter of iron" is rather Christ than the assembly of Christians, it is certain that the woman of the Apocalypse is also and especially Mary. Mary is the exemplar and the Mother; the Church is the daughter and the reproduction of that Mother. The texts of the Book of Genesis and of the Gospel of Saint John (*xix*: 26-27) apply to both Mary and to the Church in the same way.

We can, then, take literally the words of that Abbe de l'Etoile, who lived in the twelfth century: "The Son of God having become the son of man, made sons of God many . . . by human generation they are more than one; through divine regeneration these are only one with Him; for Christ is alone and complete; He is Head and Body: the one only Christ is of one only God in heaven and of only one mother on earth. As there are many sons, Mary and the Church form one and many mothers, one and many virgins. Each is a mother; each is a virgin; both the one and the other conceive by the same Spirit without passion; each brings forth progeny to God the Father without sin, one sole race. . . . For this reason, in the Scriptures, inspired from heaven, what is understood about the universal virgin mother Church is understood of the Virgin Mary alone; and what

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is understood especially of the Virgin Mother Mary is by right understood of the virgin mother Church in general; and as the discourse fits either of the two, the sentiments are understood to apply interchangeably and at the same time to both the one and the other.

“Furthermore, the terms spouse of the Word, Mother of Christ, daughter and sister of Christ can be applied reasonably to each individual soul. For that reason, Wisdom, which is the Word of the Father, intends that one understand these titles as universally true of the Church, especially true of Mary, and particularly true of every faithful soul.”⁴⁰

Let us conclude simply that although we work supernaturally in the Church and through the Church, we are also acting through Mary and Jesus; Mary and Jesus are real and living persons who give to the Church its integrity and its fecundity.

MARY'S ACTION IN THE CHURCH

The action of the Church does not follow or succeed Mary's action; it is sustained and vivified by the simultaneous action of Mary whose presence is as efficacious today as it was yesterday. In the past, Mary acted all alone. She brought forth what the Church could never have brought forth: the Word Incarnate, source of all good. She gave birth to the Church which has received the power only to apply to souls the merits of the Word Incarnate. In the present, this same application of the merits of Jesus Christ belongs to Mary in an eminent degree and to the Church dependent upon Mary.⁴¹ The pres-

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ence of Mary is no less effective because it is hidden. On the contrary, roots are always hidden.

The testimony of tradition assures us that Mary cooperates principally in the preservation and the propagation of the unity of the Church. "Unity is the fruit of the maternity of Mary," as Leo XIII put it.⁴² In Mary the unity of the Man-God and also the unity of the Church was realized. For that reason Mary is called "the pillar and foundation of truth."⁴³ Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Adjutricem Populi* (Sept. 5, 1895) has pictured magnificently the great victories which Mary has won over the enemies of the Christian Faith.

The Holy Virgin also preserves and increases the sanctity of the Church; for from her pure heart come forth those streams of life which the Church causes to flow into our souls by means of the sacraments.⁴⁴

In Baptism the Spirit who is responsible for our birth in the Church is the same Spirit who begot the Son of God in the womb of Mary. Through both operations Christ augmented His being. (St. Leo the Great).

These words of Saint Leo can be applied to all of the sacraments. Who does not recognize the close relation between Mary's action and the sacrament of the Eucharist? The Blessed Virgin knew, perhaps, that all souls would be nourished if she gave to the Word a Body which could be food for men. In any case, it is certain that it is "the body born of the Virgin Mary" which is distributed at the Holy Table.

Every time a priest consecrates the host and distributes Communion, what does he do except to

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fulfill the constant wish of Mary? In the litanies of the Blessed Virgin one finds many Eucharistic invocations: "Guardian of the Church," "Spiritual Bethlehem," "House of Bread," "Granary of the divine wheat," "Altar of life," "Spiritual Table whence the living Bread is served," "Fertile Field of living grain," "Flower of Life," "Food of Christians," "Tabernacle of holiness," et cetera.⁴⁵

Souls, then, are not sanctified through the priesthood without being sanctified at the same time by her who more than all priests together has the power to distribute graces. "I agree," says Gerson, "that the Virgin Mary does not possess formally the sacerdotal character but she does possess in an eminent degree the power to reconcile sinners and to open paradise for them; for she is truly the gate of heaven."⁴⁶ What the doctors of the Church say of the first Apostles can be stated even more truly about their successors. Mary, through the power of the Holy Ghost enlightened them, directed them, and communicated to them a love which encompassed them, a zeal which devoured them, the gift of tongues by which they converted souls, and the power of miracles. Saint Ephrem wrote:

*From you, O Mary, the apostles, the prophets, the just and the humble of heart have received and will receive all glory, honor, and sanctity. . . . You are the eloquent tongue of the apostles, the hidden confidence of conquerors, the joy and glory of all priests.*⁴⁷

And Saint Augustine declared the same idea:

You are the life and model of apostles, the patience and the refuge of martyrs, the mistress and

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*the protectress of confessors, the sovereign and the strength of virgins.*⁴⁸

How could one think that Catholic Action could be anything else but a continuation of Mary's action?

MARY EVER PRESENT

In addition to all that has been said, however much Mary has been hidden, her presence has been manifested in a powerful way during the twenty centuries of the life of the Church. It is the Virgin Mary who has victoriously directed the struggles of the Faith against heresies and enemies of the Church. One cannot survey the history of religious orders, of sanctity, of conversions, and of vocations; the history of theology, of mystical life, of the Christian arts, of pilgrimages, and of piety in general without encountering the presence of Mary throughout every century and every nation. There is not one liturgical cycle in which Mary does not hold an important place; there is not a Sacrifice of the Mass, a recitation of the Office, nor a ceremony in which the name of Mary does not occur with that of Christ. Every Church has an altar dedicated to Mary. Who among the faithful does not possess Mary's rosary and her scapular? Places of pilgrimage like that of Lourdes have been multiplied; the benefactions of Mary are innumerable.

So well known in the Church today is the truth that Mary is the "mediatrix of all graces" that one may well hope to see it defined as a dogma in the near future. The works of theologians, far from restricting the powers of Mary, contribute to their

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expansion by pointing out more and more their universal efficacy. Not only in the old religious orders, but also in all congregations, large and small, which are still being established, devotion to Mary plays a prominent part.⁴⁹

Bossuet represents Mary acting in the mystical body of Christ, that is, in all the members of her Son. He shows us

*. . . her heart in the hearts of all those who suffer in order to aid them to plead for mercy; in the wounds of all the injured to help them to beg for relief; in all charitable hearts to urge them to hasten to the alleviation, the support, the consolation of the needy and the afflicted; in all the apostles to announce the Gospel, in all the martyrs in order to enable them to shed their blood; finally, in all the faithful, in order that they may observe the precepts, heed the counsels, and imitate her virtues.*⁵⁰

What a model for an apostle! As little, therefore, as one knows about Mary's action in the bosom of the living Church, whether in the past or in the present, one cannot imagine Catholic Action independent of Mary and outside of the constant influence of the Holy Virgin.

CONCLUSION

From the first word of the book of *Genesis* down to the last grace accorded today to a child of the Church, it is evident that the leader of Catholic Action, blessed and chosen by God, is the Blessed Virgin Mary.

No good work can be accomplished that does not have as its first Cause the Holy Trinity, but the will

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of God is such that the Trinity chooses the Virgin Mary as the unique and universal instrument of its action in the Sacred Humanity. The paternity of God and the maternity of Mary are inseparable in the generation of the Man-God and in that of all the children of God. No one could be reborn supernaturally except through the Trinity and the holy Mother of Jesus.

Catholic Action is, then, at one and the same time, the action of Christ and that of Mary in the Church. The Church is not an inert, useless instrument; it is active and fruitful. But it is so through Jesus and Mary. Without them its effort is necessarily futile.

In the accomplishment of her mission the Blessed Virgin has shown us what true Catholic Action must be: since the Church "imitates Mary" so Catholic Action must imitate Mary's action. Now, what are the characteristics which distinguish Mary's action from all other human actions? We have pointed them out briefly in the Old and the New Testaments and in the history of the Church. It was our intention to present to apostles for their meditation, a way of most unfailing and enlightened spirituality. Mary's action mobilizes all human forces against the devil, but never against men. It is spiritual; it is supernatural, because its end is supernatural. Against Satan, Mary's action is terrible and ruthless: "She will crush his head with her heel." Toward men, she is benevolent; with her power against hell, she combines the most maternal kindness for men.

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Her charity makes no exceptions among men. Her charity is mercy. She saves the world from the slavery of the devil by giving Jesus Christ to souls, through the Incarnation. That alone is her endeavor, but it alone is paramount. When she sang her *Magnificat*, she inaugurated the reign of purity, charity, and humility.

But together with Jesus Christ, Who had taken upon Himself all humanity and even the weight of sins, Mary assumed the burden of all our suffering. She accepted the human order willed and established by God. She submitted to the laws and to the conditions of a lowly life in order to redeem us from the law and the bond of sin—all of which implies a great deal; for Jesus was crucified by men.

Together with Jesus crucified, she suffered and likewise delivered us from evil by her suffering. After the death of Jesus she assumed toward men, whose mother she had become more officially, the same role which she had with respect to Jesus. In a word, one can say that she attracts men to Christ, that she unites them to Him and by the same act causes them to grow in Him. She is the artisan of unity in Christ, through charity.

Mary's action is hidden, because it transforms the world only by giving Christ to it. It is not concerned with superficial emotions. Mary's universal charity radiates the divine presence of her Son throughout the Church. Mary's action is a mystery of grace in the midst of a sinful world. Catholic Action must be the reflection of Mary's action. As Jesus said, so says Mary to us: "Come, follow Me."

Part II

Mary as Educator

The Blessed Virgin has not only been appointed to direct Catholic Action, she has likewise been charged by God to form its lay apostles to the interior life. Has she herself not been prepared by the Holy Trinity to fill that position?

It is our responsibility to enroll our souls in Mary's school. It is not our business to seek elsewhere the education which we might fail to ask of the Holy Virgin, for God has established definite order in all things which we cannot disturb without loss. Part One of this work should have convinced us that the order established by God requires us to do everything at all times through Mary.

What do we learn in Mary's school? Two lessons: To possess, and to give Jesus Christ as Mary did. Virginity and maternity, those are her two special privileges which she bestows on her disciples. She has already given them as a dowry to Holy Church, which, like her, is a virgin and a mother. But all souls educated by her acquire these same virtues little by little.

It is understood that apostles of Catholic Action should take Mary as their instructor, for the mis-

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sion and duty of their state of life remind them of these two watchwords: to possess and to give Jesus Christ. Their whole ambition is to give Christ to souls and to make the fire of the love in which Christ embraces them radiate around them. What they suffer most from is too great a devotion to exterior things. They love Jesus Christ but they do not sufficiently live in Him. Their interior life lacks depth. Will not the Holy Virgin, silent and chaste and yet ever so fruitful, confide her secret to them?

Understanding the objective of Marian education, these apostles ask us how they can be enrolled in Mary's school and how they can profit by her lessons. We answer them that there are three methods of being spiritually educated by Mary; that of prayer, that of dedication, and that of close union with her. Through prayer, they will obtain the grace of transformation into Christ, a grace that will not be accorded them by any other means; by dedication of themselves to Mary they will acquire a claim to her protection, the sort of protection for which there is no other substitute; by intimate union with Mary, they will learn that no one knows better than she how to teach them to become other Christs. Prayer as a means is well known, and dedication is treated in Part Three. We will dwell now upon the third means.

UNION WITH CHRIST THROUGH MARY

We may beg for graces from Jesus Christ with or without the aid of Mary. The Good God is merciful enough to allow His unworthy creatures to pray di-

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rectly to Him. We can enjoy the great privilege of conversing familiarly with the King of Heaven and earth without the exacting formalities of worldly courts. Were we to forbid souls to speak to Jesus as to a Spouse, a Friend, or a Brother, we would render our Catholic religion entirely too harsh.

If indeed we do consider it of value to call first on the Holy Virgin, then it is not to be with the intent of rendering Jesus Christ remote from souls, or, as it were, inaccessible to them because of His eminent dignity. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin does not disturb the union of the soul with Christ. That union so precious, so necessary, so consoling we would not wish to sacrifice for any other gain. We invoke Mary primarily to obtain more and better help toward union with Jesus Christ. The grace of possessing Christ is so tremendous that it cannot be accorded to us all at once. The Virgin Mary herself did not cease to grow in love and sanctity. Supernatural grace knows no limit here below, for the fullness of Christ is infinite and our human capacity increases with the gifts that replenish it. If, then, we beseech the Holy Virgin to intercede for us with her Son, we want her to help us attain a degree of union with her Son in which we may rest. Without her aid we would remain far from Christ.

Certainly, we can pray to Our Lord alone; no one could ever deter us. And most assuredly the good Master would not be deaf to our appeal. But we can also pray with Mary, and then our petitions become more efficacious. For our request is made to Jesus in concert with His Mother—a request which we

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may be sure will be supported, or, perhaps, even anticipated by His Mother; a request which involves the authority and the glory of His Mother. Our petition then bears the signature of His Mother, written by her very hand. What could Christ think of such a prayer?

"Whose supplication is this?" asks Jesus. Alas! Were we to judge ourselves; were we to grasp our own unworthiness, perhaps, even our guilt, would we dare to reply: "It is ours?"

Yes; we with our confidence in Him could say that. But, what happiness, what assurance, what secret strength will surge into our hearts when we can respond: "It is the prayer of Your Mother, who, as once before at Cana, prays you to change water into wine for us."

Can we imagine the embarrassment of Jesus were He inclined to refuse us that grace or to delay it until a more propitious moment? The embarrassment of course could not be real. God has a thousand reasons for not listening to us; but He has ten, yes, an hundred thousand reasons for listening to His Mother.

There is, then, difference beyond words between Marian spirituality and any other; for this prayer⁵¹ is produced by the voice of Mary; the other is only the isolated prayer of the sinner. This does not in any way mean that Mary will not also help those souls who do not invoke her aid.

MARY, SUPPLIANT, ALL-POWERFUL

Prayer through the intercession of Mary has incomparably greater power than the prayer of poor

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sinners; greater efficacy than the united prayers of all poor sinners. The evidence of this fact precludes argument. Through Mary we acquire a twofold series of rights, an unbreakable chain, as it were. First and foremost, Mary possesses the rights of a mother over her Son. The irresistible charm of her beauty and her merits would suffice to render her mistress of the Heart of Jesus. Did not King Assuerus succumb immediately to the attraction of Esther? How could Jesus fail to yield to her whose splendor He had created? But maternal authority has greater weight than the attraction of charm. No one doubts this. The divine maternity could not be subjected to a refusal. To humiliate Mary by a refusal would be inconceivable. Moreover, the whole tradition of the Church styles Mary "All-Powerful Suppliant."

God is the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent. The prayer of the Mother of God shares that prerogative; it resembles the prayer of God her Son, Our Lord. The Fathers of the Church do not hesitate to assert that Jesus is bound to do the will of the Mother of heaven.

Saint Peter Damien writes:

*As Mother of the Most High, your power equals your desire. Because of your maternal authority over God, you must be heard. The understanding cannot fathom the power of your intercession.*⁵²

*The All-powerful has done great things in you: all power is given to you in heaven and on earth. Is it possible for the divine power to oppose you from whom He received His human Body? You do not ask; you command. You are not servant but sovereign.*⁵³

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Declared Raymond Jordon:

*The All-powerful has made you all-powerful, therefore you may say: "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth." If your Son is King of kings and Lord of lords, you yourself, O Virgin Mother of Christ, are the Queen of those who know how to rule; the sovereign of those who lead; all are under your feet, the sheep and the lambs.*⁵⁴

In a touching prayer, Saint Anselm cries: "Whence comes so much power to us? It is from you, Mother of our Savior, Spouse of God, Mistress of heaven, of earth, and of all the elements."⁵⁵

Said Richard of Saint Laurence:

*The Blessed Virgin, in virtue of her maternal authority, not only prays to her Son, but she commands Him; for that reason, we say to her: "Show that you are His Mother; that is, mingle with our supplications something which adds the command of a Mother to them."*⁵⁶

To insist on further proofs of a universal truth admitted by the Church would be superfluous. This maternal all-powerfulness which, so to speak, binds Jesus Christ is a guarantee of our power as children. Mary is our mother as truly as she is Mother of Jesus. She loves us in Jesus and as she loved Jesus, for it is certain that she has received from the Holy Spirit a maternally tender heart toward each of us. Because of this second motherhood of Mary she becomes our all-powerful intercessor. Christ foresaw this development when He said to Saint John, "Behold your Mother."

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By nature, no mother is insensible to the cries of her child. She seems to hear even the unexpressed wish—she senses it. So it is with Mary. But she is even more pleased to hear us when we ask her for the glorifying life which she gave to her Son. We see, therefore, that such closely knit, firm, and unbreakable contacts with God are set up through the effectiveness of the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin that we can speak of a sort of infallibility of prayer, when we make use of Marian mediation. The two voices praying in harmony; that of the child to its mother, that of the Mother to her Son—are equally certain of being heard.

THE DESIRES OF CHRIST

The great ones of the world generally do not like their mothers to intervene for favors in behalf of the poor; it annoys them. Not so with Christ. Christ hears the prayers of His Mother not only to render homage to her maternal authority, but also to realize one of His most cherished desires. Nothing pleases Jesus more than to honor His Mother. To entrust the salvation of souls to her glorifies her more than to crown her with a million stars. Nor does glory given to Mary lessen that which belongs to Christ personally. For Mary's glory results from the gifts which the Incarnation and the Redemption showered upon her and through her on mankind. Just as the Immaculate Conception exalts the munificence of Jesus Christ, so the maternity of grace exalts at the same time both His liberality and His filial tenderness.

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Christ glories in the sanctity of the children of God. But there is more sanctity in Mary than in all creatures together. Consequently, the greater her power of sanctifying souls, the more Christ will be glorified by her. Furthermore, Jesus remembers all that He owes to His Mother: His whole physical being, His education, all the joys of her love unspeakably pure, and tender, and sweet. Undoubtedly, while yet on earth, He repaid her for all that He had received from her, but He had caused her suffering also. The compassion of Mary has increased immeasurably the abundance of her merits. Does the gratitude of a filial heart cease when justice has been satisfied or when death has separated the members of a family? No; gratitude is an immortal virtue. It flowers more in the heart of Jesus than in all of the saints. Rightly does a learned bishop of the Orient say in his *Prayer to Mary*: "Jesus cannot refuse you anything because He considers your glory His own. All of your requests He grants joyfully as a Son and a Debtor."⁵⁷

Saint Ephrem addresses the Blessed Virgin in these words:

*You have what is necessary to appease and to persuade our God unfailingly: the hands which held Him, the breast which nourished Him. Remind Him of His swaddling clothes and of the care with which you surrounded His infancy. Blend what you have done for Him with what He has done for us; speak of His cross, His wounds, and the blood which redeemed us. Your only Son has no greater pleasure than that of listening to your prayers for us. To hear them He considers as much of a glory to Him as a debt to you.*⁵⁸

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Jesus is happy to answer our supplications by His merciful gifts. He is happier to grant the request of a saint, but His joy is infinitely greater when we give Him the opportunity to answer His Mother. Shall we refuse Him this additional glory?

THE MISSION OF MARY

The Blessed Virgin herself, far from finding our requests importunate, rejoices greatly when we enable her to fulfill her important role in heaven. If we love our Mother—and who does not love her whom Jesus loved so much?—we will not fail to entrust her with a thousand matters, for it is the duty of her state, so to speak, to exercise actively her merciful power. The accomplishment of her duty increases her happiness constantly; the greater her intercession, the more truly is she Queen of the world. Not inactivity but royal service pleases her. She does not seek her own glory; Jesus does this for her. Inflamed with the love of Christ, she is eager to extend His Mystical Body. Is there anyone more eager than the Mother of Jesus to see the sublime design of Almighty God fulfilled which was revealed by Saint Paul to the Ephesians:

. . . to re-establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and those that are on earth . . . to make the two (peoples, Jews and Gentiles) into one new man . . . and to reconcile both to God in one body. (Ephesians, i: 10, 15-16).

Each time a sinner is converted, each time a soul progresses in grace, each time one of her children

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becomes more like her Son, Mary experiences a new happiness, for in her love she wants all mankind to speak to her of Jesus and to become changed into another Christ. Her whole concern is that Christ may live and increase in souls.

There is a story of a mother whose eldest son had died a hero's death at an early age. Her other children brought this mother great happiness only when they recalled the absent son to her mind by some imitation of his traits of character. All the training she gave them tended to bring about that resemblance. That mother was, without knowing it, the image of the Blessed Virgin in heaven. Mary is our instructor. It will be her glory, as it is her mission, to educate us well in the image of Christ.

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

The Church does not cease to pray to the Holy Virgin. Nor does the Church fear to be indiscreet. What could stir the soul more than the recitation of the Rosary? One single chaplet repeats the same formula fifty times. You can count the prayers addressed by the Church to Mary no more than you can count the stars in the firmament.

Let us follow the example of the Church. Even an army of beggars cannot annoy Mary, for she would save all souls without exception. She saves all who heed her voice. But the souls she desires most to bring back to Jesus are, the saints tell us, the wretched and the despairing. Her merciful power shines forth above all in desperate situations. When a sinner, frightened by the enormity of his

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crimes, can believe nothing except that he will be lost eternally, it is then that the presence of Mary enkindles a ray of hope. The brightness of the moon illuminates his night.

Theologians agree generally with Saint Alphonsus Liguori that a devout servant of Mary cannot be lost. A man may be a great sinner, but the presence of Mary will enlighten him, inspire him, and if he is docile to these special graces, he will work out his salvation.⁵⁹

"Would you believe," Peguy used to say to Joseph Lotte, "that for eighteen months I could not say, 'Our Father, Thy will be done?'" And he continues: "I could not accept His will. It was terrifying. I could not say sincerely, 'Thy will be done.' Then I prayed to Mary. Prayers to Mary are prayers of the last instance. There is not one in the whole liturgy which the most lamentable sinner could not say in all sincerity. In the scheme of salvation the *Ave Maria* is of supreme assistance. With it one cannot be lost."

As one holds his freezing hands toward a fire, so do the most wretched press toward the Immaculate Virgin. She gathers to her maternal heart the most loathsome, loathsome even to themselves; for Mary is the Refuge of sinners. Likewise, she is the Refuge of saints, at the other extreme of the moral world. For the saints are not proud of their sinlessness; like others, they mistrust their own merits and call themselves great sinners. Since they unanimously blame themselves in this fashion, one may conclude that the further away from sanctity we are, the more highly

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we esteem ourselves. The saints are close to the truth. They are also deeply conscious of their need to have recourse to Mary's intercession. There is not one of them who did not have a great devotion to the Mother of Mercy. "If you pray to your Son for me," wrote one of them, "all the saints will pray with you and help me. But if you keep silent, there will be none either to pray for me or to help me." ⁶⁰

A holy man styled the "pious fool" prayed thus: "As for me, I consider myself unworthy of the kingdom and I have cause to fear that I may finally fall under the rule of justice. If, then, your exercise of royalty, that is to say, your mercy, does not come to my aid, justice will reign over me and that, in view of the enormity of my sins, will not be for my salvation but to my condemnation." ⁶¹

Christ, moved by the misery and the burdens of the poor, came from the heart of the Father to the heart of the Virgin in order to deposit there the treasury of the poor, that is to say, of all of us. For that reason, I believe that one cannot be sure of supernatural life apart from Mary. Who, then, will assist me if I fail to have recourse to the mercy of this most indulgent Mother? So wrote a holy abbot. ⁶² And Saint Ildephonse exclaimed: "Come with me to this Virgin, lest you be lost forever; come let us hide under the mantle of her power in order that confusion may not one day cover us as a cloak." ⁶³

And Saint Bonaventure himself comments on the Marial Psalter as follows: "Whoever will honor

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Mary worthily will be justified but whoever neglects her will die in his sins. Yes, sweet Lady, those who fail to know you are far from salvation, but those who persevere in their homage need have no fear of perdition. If you assist us, we are confident; if you turn away from us, we despair of salvation."⁶⁴

In the works of the saints and in their biographies, we find numerous instances of these urgent pleadings directed to Mary by saintly souls in distress.⁶⁵ Holy Church puts before us these same sentiments of humble confidence:

*Solve vincla reis
Profer lumen caecis,
Mala nostra pelle,
Bona cuncta posce.*

*Break the captive's fetters,
Light on blindness pour;
All our ills expelling,
Every bliss implore.*⁶⁶

It is your task, O Mary, to break the captive's fetters, to give sight to the blind, to expel all our ills, and to obtain for us all happiness.

So it has ever been that the Sacred Passion of Our Lord and the mercy of Mary have inspired the tenderest outpourings of human love.

THE ATMOSPHERE OF PRAYER

Mary is the teacher of the apostle who invokes her. In various ways she teaches him the two essentials: the possession and the giving of Jesus Christ.

In the first place, she responds unfailingly to

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prayer by bringing forth Christ, so to speak, in the soul of the suppliant. Into this member of the Mystical Body, like a divine blood-stream, flow abundant graces which could not be obtained without the aid of Mary Most-Powerful, and these graces cause him to grow in Christ in every way.

Next, the habit of praying to the Blessed Virgin each time he wishes to possess Christ more enables the apostle to live under the eyes of his Mother—and what a Mother! In other words, the soul lives in the radiance of her benevolence. In order to elucidate this effect of grace, we may say that the soul lives daily in a Marian atmosphere.

The word “atmosphere” connotes the general effect of the conditions of life and their constant and secret influence on the whole being. It stifles or invigorates. But because Mary is our Mother and because the life she gives us is Christ, we can say that the man accustomed to praying to his Mother dwells in his native country and in his natural atmosphere.

There is another comparison which appears to us to explain better the educative role of the presence of Mary. The spiritual abode of an apostle who does not think of Mary is very much like the family home when the mother is dead. Is a house without a mother still a home for the children? That light, that warmth, that pure and affectionate atmosphere of the mother’s presence vanished on the day the mother’s voice was stilled, her countenance stiffened in death, her eyes closed, her step silenced, her image effaced. The father and even strangers may perform

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the same task as did the mother; they do not have the maternal touch. To fill an empty chair is not to replace the absent one. A person is not a thing. The mother is a unique being. Mary seems absent only to those souls who have enjoyed the blessing of her presence.

Happy the children who not only have their father, but at their right and their left both father and mother; happy those who wherever they look see a loving face! Happy those who, when they ask a favor from their father, feel the confident, gentle encouragement of a mother, who prays with them and whose supplicating look they see reflected in the eyes of their father.

Filial devotion toward Mary inspires the militant with the divine art of winning souls for Jesus Christ. Now, if it is helpful to give suggestions, a course of instructions, of investigations, of readings, conferences, and spiritual exercises, in a word, every human means of help, to him, whose soul we wish to win, how much better and more helpful is it to give him also and above all an all-powerful Mother, the Mother of mercy, the Refuge of sinners, the Gate of heaven, the Consolation of the afflicted, the Queen of virgins and of apostles! Without question, the objective is not that he may live according to Mary but that he may live in Christ. But Mary, if she be invoked, loved, and served will give him Christ infinitely more than the most ingenious human means. It is the Mother who gives the Child; it is the Virgin who gives Jesus. She gives Him every-

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where: in friendship, in prayer, and in the Eucharist. With all that, we must not scorn human means which are the necessary instruments of grace. At any rate, we must make human means instruments of grace. How? Through prayer seconded by the intercession of Mary. The necessity of prayer restores the importance of the presence of Mary in the education of apostles.

CONSECRATION TO MARY

Mary spiritually educates souls who earnestly beg her to do so, but for souls consecrated to her, she does still more. Consecration to the Blessed Virgin is a traditional means of sanctification in the Church and one highly recommended by the practice of the saints. We shall say only a word about it here since we must return to the subject at the end of this work.

Consecration is the complete and unreserved surrender of one's self to the service of a Lord. Strictly speaking, one who gives himself could not be called "consecrated" were it not that his new Master is God, for only that which belongs to God is sacred. But Christ and His Mother have exceptional rights which no creature can claim. Christ alone is Our Lord and only His Mother is Our Lady. We belong to Christ in a twofold manner; by virtue of creation, which was an act common to the Three Persons; and by virtue of the Redemption. We belong to the Mother of Christ in a twofold manner: by virtue of her divine maternity, and by virtue of her universal mediation.

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We are members of Christ because we are creatures of God; we are children of the Virgin because we are members of Christ. These are necessary, absolute, and unique bonds of dependence in the supernatural order. It is, then, lawful to consecrate oneself to Christ and to His Mother but not to the angels or the saints.

CONSECRATION AND SONSHIP

It is very evident that consecration in itself does not CREATE the bonds of dependence of which we have spoken. On the contrary, it PRESUPPOSES them. And above all, it brings them back to memory and gives them all their importance. Must one think that men are all consecrated to Mary or that those few consecrated are not different from other men? All men in truth belong to Mary, but all are not consecrated to her for the reason that they do not realize that this Holy Virgin is also their Mother, or though recognizing this fact in principle, they fail to do anything about it and act as if they had forgotten it.

Consecration to Mary requires living in accordance with the demands and duties of state resulting from the fact that we are Mary's sons; proving oneself filial toward Mary throughout life; forbidding every act which would offend her maternal glance; observing in the whole moral domain the distinction proper to her race. Consecration to the Blessed Virgin is something more profound than an engagement of honor. Two strangers may pledge each other loyalty and fidelity as did the knights of the Middle

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Ages. But Mary is no stranger; she is our Mother. As there are patriotic and family honors, so likewise is there a Marian honor, the effect or result of our noble lineage. We who are born of Christ and, at the same time, of the Virgin comprehend that as children of Mary we have been raised far above the dignity of royal offspring or of the nobility of princes.

To consecrate oneself is to proclaim in the presence of Jesus and Mary that one promises never to disgrace so illustrious a family. Consecration binds in honor, without reserve, to the end of life to behave worthily and wholly as a true child of the Mother of God. Each one's fidelity will be proportionate to his measure of grace. But at this point Mary assumes her role as Educator.

EDUCATION OF THE CONSECRATED

Since royal children receive a royal education, Mary is obliged to give the greatest care to the education of those consecrated to her. Human analogies which the Fathers of the Church and theologians use so frequently to clarify mysteries of the supernatural order, convince us that the Queen of heaven treats children whose consecration to her she has accepted much as an earthly queen deals with the young princes. She selects for them the world's best teachers; she entrusts their spiritual welfare to notable spiritual directors, and these, both teachers and directors, strive to prove themselves worthy of these royal marks of esteem.

The formidable responsibilities they assume stimulate them to serve courageously. They do not

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need to worry about expense. Health of body as well as of soul is the object of constant solicitude. And the Queen, ever mindful of this education, holds it dear to her heart.

Not for an instant can one doubt Mary's similar interest in souls consecrated to her love. The act of consecration is a pact. One could not imagine that Our Lady, ever mindful of her mission of forming souls in Christ, would not pledge herself to give the hundredfold to those who abandon themselves completely to her maternal providence. It would seem to us unworthy of a queen were she to be indifferent about the education of her children. More unworthy, however, are those who imagine such an attitude on the part of a Queen who is the Mother of Jesus.

Shall we try, therefore, to describe the wealth of graces that a Marian education implies? All this is an extraordinary mystery. It is sufficient, we think, to compare the heart of that Mother with that of the most loving of mothers; the gifts of that Virgin as an Educator with those of the most brilliant of teachers; the infinite resources of that Queen with the riches of the most fortunate of queens, in order to give some remote idea of the spiritual advantages which consecration to Mary procures for souls.

We can readily believe that Mary, Queen of the Angels, gives to her consecrated children, the most excellent among the angels as teachers. We have good reason to think also, that she prepares those who are to play a particularly consoling and providential role in the supernatural world, since it seems

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logical that for a mission as important as that entrusted to her mercy, she would select her ambassadors from among those consecrated to her and trained by her. Almost all priests, religious, and missionaries, therefore, receive their vocations from Mary in return for their whole-hearted consecration to her.

We are convinced, finally, that as Queen of Catholic Action, she enlists in a special way apostles who have dedicated themselves to the cause of fighting without respite for her and of crushing together with her the head of the serpent.

Not only by her devotedness and her services does an educator form her pupils but also by the constant direction which she gives to their personal activities. Mary by her favors forms Jesus in those who invoke her, and she brings about the marvelous spiritual development of those who entrust their spiritual life to her and who try to learn in her school the divine art of possessing Jesus and of giving Him to others.

Since we are not considering here the question of the reception of many graces only, but rather that of collaboration with Mary as the spiritual director of souls, we must analyze our spiritual activities somewhat psychologically. It is the doing rather than the receiving that Christians look for in Catholic Action. Since they place most of their efforts there, it certainly should help their sanctification if we analyze their inner efforts.

Let us put the question frankly: Is union with Our Lady necessary to achieve union with Our

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Lord? We should conclude that nothing equals in value the intimacy of the heart with Christ, loved in Himself first, and then in all other things. Is it not a spiritual blunder to introduce into the divine solitude of the soul with its God another creature, even were she the Immaculate one?

We consider the realization of this triune life of the soul with Mary and Jesus to be very profitable spiritually.

A JESUS-MARY DIPTYCH

Can we speak of an insufficiency of Christ? Christ possesses the fulness of the divinity. Every grace which we receive comes to us from Christ. It would be a paradox to say that Jesus is not sufficient for us. Yet, in a certain sense, the paradox can be sustained.

Graces are given to us in many ways: for example, for our bodily sustenance they come to us as food and drink. For the nourishment of our souls they could have come to us directly from Christ without an intermediary. But God has willed—and this is the unanimous opinion of the Church—that Mary should be chosen as a reservoir or storehouse whence we draw our graces.

From another point of view, distribution of grace can take place either directly as an infused gift of God, or indirectly by active cooperation on our part; that is, in addition to the graces which fall upon us as the morning dew upon the silent earth, other graces come to us through our cooperation. After contemplating the perfections of Christ, we strive to

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imitate them. We look at them, we see them, we imitate them; all that cooperation comes from us and constitutes, nevertheless, a stream of grace.

Now, one can say that Christ, as the exemplar of sanctity, does not have His complete expression without the saints and, above all, without His Mother. All the saints contribute to reveal hidden aspects of His infinite beauty, but the Holy Virgin more than the saints reflects resplendently the mysterious perfection of Christ. We do not allude merely to the superiority of Mary's sanctity over that of the saints. The Mother of Jesus plays a role complementary to that of Christ and one which can in no way be attributed to the saints.

Turned toward us to enable us to find our way, the countenance of Jesus and that of Mary constitute, so to speak, a Jesus-Mary diptych, one exemplary reality. Mary is what Christ would be were He at one and the same time the Divine Model and the creature who imitates the Divine Model. Christ is the Man-God, the Divine Model, not an imitator of the Model. His proper function is that of revealing God to man. He could not at the same time do what the man who is not God could do, that is, look upon, and imitate the God-Man.

Christ is like the sun; the Virgin, like the moon, "beautiful as the moon." The moon reflects the light of the sun; like a mirror without shadow, it shows the beauty of the sun to eyes dazzled by sunlight. The saints, too, are mirrors reflecting the brilliance of the Divine Son, but they are not the mirror *par excellence*, the Immaculate one.

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Mary belongs to an order higher than that of the saints. As she is full of grace, she is likewise full of truth and light. In her we see spirituality in its pure state, the plenitude of the perfection of a human being that is not God. We could multiply the number of the angels and the saints; their holiness combined could not equal that of a second Mother of God.

As the Son of God; Christ turns toward the Father; Mary turns toward Christ as representative of the Mystical Body. He that sees Christ sees the Father; this expression interpreted means that one goes to the Father through Christ. So, likewise, one goes to Christ through Mary. Below Mary's rank there are no mediators; there are only followers or disciples.

Yes; he is a member of Christ, but by baptism and through the Eucharist; he is a son of God, yes; but by adoption. But is not his pride going to undermine his dignity? Does he imagine that he is Christ Himself? Or that he is perfectly united with Christ? A member totally purified and developed into Christ? Between Christ and us there is a wide abyss excavated by our unworthiness.

When one belongs to Christ, he experiences difficulty, perhaps, not in approaching the Father through Christ, but in making a perfect approach to Christ Himself. For sin and suffering are like two enormous obstacles preventing union with Christ. To live a spiritual life does not mean merely a life in union with Christ; it implies growth, a process of

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development which is difficult, painful, obscure; it is subject to illusions, errors, and failures, although growth in Christ progresses.

The Virgin Mary is the guide *par excellence* during this process of growth. She herself grew in Christ without any possible mistakes or delays. The root of Jesse alone has mounted upward with an impulse which nothing has restrained. We have dogmatic proofs of Mary's perfect imitation of the Word Incarnate but we have them for no one else. It is, then, by truly following her guidance that we can become other Christs. It is by observing this holy Mistress of life that we shall learn how to possess Jesus Christ and how to give Him to others. Mary is the Bible of spirituality. All schools of spiritual life are good if they follow the course traced by Mary. Those that disapprove of her guidance are suspect. On earth still, Mary conquers heresy.

Perhaps some one will ask: Why do you propose for our imitation the virtues of Mary rather than those of Jesus? We reply that we propose only the virtues of Jesus, but as they may be seen in the light of Mary. We propose for imitation the virtues of Jesus as they are seen in Mary, interpreted by Mary, explained by Mary, and given to us by her. Jesus is, so to speak, the original text; Mary is its authentic commentary to which all other interpretations must be referred. Just as we know the life of Jesus from the direct testimony of the evangelists so we learn from the splendor of Mary's virtues how to reproduce the true virtues of His Infinite Majesty. Whatever does not accord with the conduct of Mary is, in a

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way, apocryphal, that is, a fictitious account of the life of Christ.

Mary, therefore, is truly the teacher of all Christians. We have only one Master, Jesus Christ, and we have only one Instructress, His Mother. Jesus is the unique Master, for His role is to educate the minds and hearts of His followers to the sincere knowledge of this Divine Truth.

The Church also constantly applies to Mary passages of the *Book of Wisdom* and of *Ecclesiastes* which relate to the guidance of souls. According to the classic formula, "To Jesus through Mary,"—*ad Jesum per Mariam*—the Blessed Virgin is Instructress as well as Mother.

We shall understand this consoling doctrine more and more as we go into a more detailed explanation of her role as educator. Since a complete description of Mary's interior life is impossible, we must be satisfied with eight explanations which may be called eight Marial Beatitudes.

PREPARATION FOR ACTION

The first truth which impresses the militant of Catholic Action who enrolls in the school of the Blessed Virgin is one which the study of Christ alone perhaps has not revealed to him. It is the fact that the human instrument needs a prolonged preparation for his task. Mechanics and artists realize their inability to produce an excellent work with a mediocre instrument.

Through necessity Jesus was God; at any time

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from the moment of His birth He could have redeemed the world. Unlike to us, He did not begin in a state of sin or sheer incapacity. He belonged to another transcendent order. The position of the Blessed Virgin however, is more like ours. Like all creatures, she came from nothingness and had to acquire everything.

From Mary we can learn the way in which God wishes to be served by us. We must accept God's plan in its entirety. We, like Mary, are born predestined for a work in the Church and endowed with the particular gifts which enable us to fulfill our duty perfectly. This idea is not of purely theological interest, for it entails serious practical consequences.

God had decided that Jesus should have a human Mother, but the Divine Maternity was not to be given to a creature incapable of fulfilling her mission. Moreover, God raised Mary to the highest sanctity which Christ could desire for His mother. Her Son appreciated harmony, order, and propriety. The more beautiful Mary would be, the more worthy she would be to bear the Word Incarnate. Because of all the graces bestowed upon Mary by the Holy Ghost, the archangel Gabriel greeted her as the one "full of grace."

Apropos of these circumstances Bossuet remarks that every masterpiece is the product of great labor and of care. Inspired by Tertullian, Bossuet in his excellent meditation on the Word Incarnate, model of all created beauty, applies the idea of the masterpiece to the Blessed Virgin.

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"Do not be surprised, Christians, that Mary was formed with so much care and born with so many graces. This is as it should be, for God fashioned her with the Savior only in mind. In order to render Mary worthy of His Son, He modeled her after that same Son, and as Christ was soon to be born, God the Father used Mary's birth as a fore-runner of Christ's appearance; Christ, in a sense, is already existing in the living and maternal expression of His infinite perfections." ⁶⁷

Bossuet applies the same teaching to Saint Joseph. And for us, too, God has the same solicitude.⁶⁸ We all have a special function in the Mystical Body. Predestined to be the sons of God, we all receive a particular mandate; from this proceeds our dignity; from it, our responsibilities are born and from it is engendered our hope.

Our responsibilities depend likewise on the choice of God for us. To err in the choice of one's vocation is the greatest tragedy of life. Like Mary, we too have a "Fiat" in answer to the message of the angel. With no intention of irreverence, we can understand the horrible disaster that would have befallen the human race had Mary refused the proposals of God. We present this hypothesis only because we are exposed to the danger of betraying the divine expectations. The problem of a vocation takes precedence over all else. An erroneous choice of vocation may ruin an entire life.

A careful meditation on the Blessed Virgin aids

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us to comprehend the importance of making decisions not through conceit and cowardice but in accordance with the will of God. Presumption urges us to assume, both in our spiritual life and in Catholic Action, undertakings which, for lack of grace, we cannot fulfill. Cowardice, on the other hand, causes us to renounce responsibilities for which God would have bestowed sufficient grace.

We should be confident of our ability to accomplish the designs of God. Divine Mercy is infinitely wise; it asks for nothing that it has not already generously given. As needs arise, it provides abundant graces. Jesus Christ never feared responsibilities nor mistrusted Himself. The Blessed Virgin on receiving the striking message of the Angel gives us a true example of a soul convinced of its lowliness, but generously pronouncing its *Fiat* — compliance with God's will.

Therefore, enlightened by Mary, we should realize that the following of Christ demands above everything else the fulfilling of one's personal vocation. Each individual is called, but in different ways. There is only one Christ, but there are innumerable images of Christ, molded by the Holy Spirit. We, too, encouraged by Mary's example and inspired by the Holy Ghost learn to approach Christ with humble assurance.

PURITY OF SOUL

Under the guidance of Mary one also learns that in order to possess Christ oneself and to give Him to

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others it is necessary to prepare one's soul by the greatest possible purity.

Because Jesus was God He never had to purify His Soul for union with God. Without any questioning, His preaching, His life, and especially His Passion convince us of His horror for sin. But His mission as Savior constrained Him to show a special merciful preference for sinners, the lost sheep, the prodigals, the publicans, and the Magdalens. Zeal prompted Christ to seek their company. Here, however, is the magnificent reality which, more than His discourses, clarifies His profoundest sentiment. Jesus desired that His Mother should be immaculate. From the stain of original sin, He freed her because even the thought of a blemish was opposed to that intimate union between Jesus and His Mother. How eloquent is this realization. To contemplate the sublime grandeur of the Immaculate Virgin is to understand the desire of Jesus.

By virtue of living in the presence of Mary and of feeling the purity of Mary's virginity radiating over one, he experiences an eager desire and urgent need of being pure. One is assured that by striving to free himself from his faults of pride, self-love and sensuality he will possess Jesus Christ. Therefore, we go to Jesus through Mary.

We have reason to fear that some misguided apostles confuse true charity with sentimental exaltation. In consequence they combine true and false mysticism when encouraged by burning words and writings; they seem to be uplifted spiritually and

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yet fail entirely to combat first the inner demon of their own pride and sensuality. In addition to these deluded apostles there are those who, ignoring the importance of purity, have much less of Christ's true spirit than they realize. Since Catholic Action is a constant struggle against Satan, its leaders must first crush the spirit of Satan in the depths of their own consciences.

Union with Mary, simultaneously, inspires hatred of sin and love of Christ. The true follower yearns to convert himself rather than others; he considers himself unworthy of praise and success, and reproaches himself more readily than he does others. Penance, interior mortification, Mass, Holy Communion, prayer, and every means for self-purification receive greater evaluation, and genuine spiritual influence is measured by an increase in detachment from the world and from self. And gradually the temptations of the spirit and of the flesh encounter a strong resistance in the heart and will of the sincere disciples. Have not the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and the Saints generally esteemed devotion to Mary as one of the most powerful means of preserving chastity?⁶⁹ It serves as a shield and a weapon.

The Blessed Virgin teaches us likewise under what conditions we may give Jesus Christ to others. For she conceived the Word in her soul, so to speak, before conceiving Him in her flesh.⁷⁰ The generation of Christ and that of His Mystical Body in Mary are the work of the Holy Spirit. Mary's super-

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natural power was without measure; it extended as far as the Redemption of her Son.⁷¹ Only "Heavenly Power" can redeem a sin-laden world.

The lesson of Mary convinces souls that the apostolate is effective only when it is the work of the Holy Ghost, through Whom also from a spirit of love the Mystical Body was born in the womb of regenerated humanity. Souls, habitually conscious of Mary, regard as their first apostolic responsibility that of avoiding sin — the cause of all separation from God. The freer they are from all sin, the more capable they consider themselves of true Catholic Action. The advancement of the Kingdom of Christ appears to true apostles as a radiation of purity, that is to say, of love.

We must learn this lesson of Mary. Would that Catholics engaged in zealous works were sincerely more careful about avoiding their own personal sins than about trying to influence their fellow men by human means. Deliberate sin, even if only venial, certainly has consequences.

The fundamental error can be readily explained. The purification of one's conscience is certainly not an attractive social activity; the spirituality of some militant groups ordinarily functions in things more external, less personal. And so it happens that very noble motives can at times become a playground for Satan.

The insistence which some charitable writers place on emphasizing the mercy of the Savior for the lost sheep mollifies somewhat the severe hatred of

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sin which we must always retain. We accustom ourselves to the false idea that the divine favors accorded to the most wretched sinners are ordinary graces which we can more or less hope to receive for ourselves.

We are reminded of the very deplorable remark of William James in regard to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga: "It is more advantageous to yield to some misdemeanors than to remain inexperienced and chaste." This is the erroneous conclusion of the pseudo-philosopher who prefers men whom he considers socially useful to those who possess only sanctity—even heroic sanctity, for the latter evokes in Mr. James more disgust than admiration.⁷²

You wonder if it is possible to conquer the wiles of Satan without the assistance of the religious vow of chastity. Yes, we are certain that personal devotion to the Mother of God preserves souls from sins and from faults which are most detrimental to an effective apostolate.

THE INTERIOR RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE OF MARY

For the reception of divine graces Mary prepared herself by the practice of a virtue possessed to an infinite degree by Christ, but which, because of its transcendency, is difficult for us. We refer to the practice of interior recollection.

The Word Incarnate lives a more interior life than any creature; a life more recollected than the angels and the Queen of Angels; He is God and dwells in the abiding presence of His Father. "The

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Father lives in Me and I in the Father.” Christ is One of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity, therefore His interior life is incomprehensible to us.

We are impressed when we read about Christ’s long retirement at Nazareth, His retreats in the desert, and His nocturnal vigils alone on the mountain, but we somewhat forget or fail to heed the lessons Christ would teach us. The appearance of Christ as the long-expected Messiah startles us. His busy days are spent in the synagogues and public squares in the midst of the noisy, jostling crowd. While performing miracles, arguing with the Pharisees, antagonizing the Sadducees, and driving the money changers out of the Temple, Christ proclaims the Truth with God-like assurance. Around Him disturbance and intrigue increase. “He seduceth the people,” shout His enemies. Did not His role of the Messiah oblige Him “to bring the sword and not peace?” (Matt., x: 34). Yes, and consequently this role of Christ as the fearless defender attracts militant leaders today; and in concentration on that phase of Christ’s active life lies the danger.

Again we turn to Mary. She, who is not the Messiah, is a better example for souls who would listen to the Messiah.

Since Mary is a creature like us she had to acquire her knowledge, and for that reason she ponders and meditates as the heavenly wisdom fills her heart. Before we become engrossed in the apostolic struggles of the active life, we should appreciate the dominant part recollection played in Mary’s edu-

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cation and we should reflect on our personal method of learning Christ's way.

How extraordinary it is that Mary, inspired by God, remained so completely hidden and silent! Hers was not the taciturnity often indicative of weakness of character, dullness of mind, or lack of cultural interests. Nor could her words be vain nor vapid, for her intellect was brilliant and her heart overflowed with the Wisdom of her Unborn Son. While we do not compare her words with those of Christ, nevertheless, we reiterate that her silence was more valuable than any words of wisdom she might have spoken. Jesus as Teacher had to preach. Mary as pupil remained silent to learn and ponder the Truth. "Mary kept all these words in her heart."

In order to hear the Word of God silence is necessary. We need no urging to express our opinions; in this, all succeed. Our enemies must resort to the masterful use of propaganda and external activities. But the sublimity of our work demands that we hear the Word of God in the silence of our souls, and that we meditate on His Gospel in order that it may fructify first in our own hearts.⁷³

A personal history of Mary similar to that of Christ in the Gospels might have increased our knowledge of these truths about Mary, but it would not be so valuable as our learning from her the art of interior meditation, which floods the soul with the light of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles who heard Christ preach more frequently than the Gospel records did not understand His message until after the

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Holy Ghost descended upon them in the Cenacle.

Likewise, when our souls are silent and attentive to the interior movements of grace, the Holy Spirit teaches us the truths of God. Noise, hurry, excessive activity bespeak an empty waste, while interior silence produces results hitherto unimagined. The silence of Mary was as indispensable for our instruction as was the preaching of Christ: both are correlating inspirations.

Therefore the souls guided by Mary, impressed by her example, understand the necessity of recollection and the consequent possession of Jesus Christ, His doctrines, and inspiration. We too must realize that education by Mary is a genuine necessity for us if we wish to become true, effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

THE DOCILITY OF THE QUEEN

Before using Mary for the realization of His plan, God waited until she was ready to abandon herself perfectly to His will; in this lesson as in all preceding ones, Mary would teach us.

Certainly the lessons of total submission of our will to that of the Father, Jesus Christ Himself taught us in a forceful manner during His entire life.

The theological turn of mind can sometimes lessen our consideration of these spiritual perspectives; we regard the obedience of Christ as a sign of union which the Son alone has with his Father, a sign, as it were, of the "circumincision" of the three Divine Persons.

To say that the Son of God is subject to His

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Father is inconsequential, for He tells us repeatedly that He and the Father are "one." "My Father works even now as I work." (*John, v: 17*). Therefore Jesus appears to us not only as the absolute King of the world and of souls, but also as a God, a Master of His own Will. We must learn from these ideas more than just the unity of the Blessed Trinity, for we have here the lesson of Christ's complete acceptance of His Father's Will.

If we ask Mary for an explanation and exposition of this obedience of her Son, we learn that she, the Mother of God, His holiest and most powerful creature, attained her sanctity and power through her complete docility and compliance with the Will of God. Mary, like us, can of herself do nothing; she leaves all to God. We must also admire her carefulness in never substituting the slightest inclination of her will for that of the Will of God. Her most significant response expressed her desire to serve God: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; Be it done unto me according to Thy Word."

Formation in this supernatural docility or acceptance, which comes through compliance with the Holy Spirit, is perhaps what we chiefly lack. After all we do very little when we obey the promptings of grace which display a certain strength and glory. We are banefully and almost incurably proud of that subtle conceit of cherishing the independence of our will. Furthermore, our secret indocility frustrates many of our endeavors, because they are performed for self and not for God. Would that we had some

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slight realization of what God could do with us if we were supple, dependable instruments in His Hand.

“Unpreparedness for the unexpected opportunity causes almost all of life’s failures. In striving for unworthy personal satisfactions, in fearing the sacrifice of our own opinions, we obstruct God’s great plans for us. Saint Ignatius also teaches that our formidable resistance causes this ineffectuality. In order to accomplish God’s Will, we need a trusting humility, an alertness of mind ever prepared for the unexpected; a docility enabling us to accept the unfamiliar; a detachment from the familiar and pleasant; a poverty of mind and heart, encouraging us to accept all privations; and finally we must have a love of God which welcomes sincerely the lessons which demand mortification and the cross which crucifies. How our poor human nature shrinks from these exacting efforts or even from the more trivial demands which are, nevertheless, the only means of entrance to the kingdom of Christ.”⁷⁴

To mollify our obstinacy and fear, Mary, as it were, renders our rigid tendencies pliable and flexible in order that we may receive the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Mary effects this change in her clients by the graces she secures for them and by the illuminating charm of her example.

No child was ever so submissive to God’s guidance as Mary; never did she manifest any resistance. Submission exalted Mary. “He hath exalted the humble.” In addition to admiring Mary’s great deeds, achieved because of her docility to all the in-

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spirations of the Holy Ghost, we should learn the rare and difficult art of performing all of our acts from a supernatural motive, that is, through God and with God.

THE INTIMACY OF THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE

The apostles, instructed by Mary, as to how to acquire the indwelling of Christ in their souls, are likewise trained to reproduce therein the virtues He displayed at His Incarnation. The apostle must possess and share Christ.

First fruit of Marian piety is to imbue the Christian life with a spirit of intimacy and of dependence, similar to the spirit of a family.

The presence of Mary, our Mother, humanizes our relationship with God to such an extent, that in order to satisfy the divine requisites we do not have to struggle to go beyond our human limitations, but rather to return simply to our most basic, fundamental, and ingenuous spirit, namely, that of a child. Religion, according to pagans, was terrifying and tragic, but through Mary's inspiration it has become a possession very natural to the human heart, harmonizing easily with life's most spontaneous sentiments.

We believe that Christ through His Incarnation became our Brother, and through His mediation on Calvary we acquired the right to call God "Our Father." Our noble elevation through this Incarnation is due to the fact that the flesh Christ assumed was that of the spotless Virgin; for only through Mary do we become members of God's family.

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In addition to her maternal role, there is another one of a psychological order. We believe in the fraternity of Jesus because He is a Man like us, but to believe that He is the Child of the same Mother as we, is another consideration. Our impressions or reactions to these two aspects of the same Mystery are not identical.

The Word Incarnate remains God. Some souls, more conscious of the tragic depth of the drama of Divine Love, experience in the presence of this mystery a sort of paralyzing consternation and moral agony. However, the love of God, because of Christ's Presence in Mary, assumes a connotation hitherto unimagined. We can contemplate the God of heaven and earth as a Baby in swaddling clothes, who cried and was cared for by His loving Mother, Mary. We see the shepherds caress Him, Who resembles their gentlest lamb. The Magi coming from afar to adore the King of the Jews found an Infant with His youthful Mother, named Mary. The Eternal Father's greatest gift to man appears as a helpless Babe, not unlike all other children. With true humility of heart, the Son of God lowered Himself to our level in every respect. Before Jesus was able to walk, relatives, friends and neighbors vied with one another to carry Him in their arms. In a short time He became the companion of the boys in the neighborhood. Are these ideas unbecoming, inappropriate? Indeed they are not. Jesus is the Son of Mary, who is the spouse of Joseph, and our Mother, also.

A feeling of brotherliness permeates the true Marian spirituality. This does not mean that the

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soul's relationship with Jesus Christ lacks that very definite reverential respect which is due to God. The adoration is trustful, sincere, and free from any reservation. Are not these the characteristics of the affections among brothers of well-bred families? Regardless of the sublimity of the supernatural life, it functions in a way similar to that of nature or of convention; artificiality is as out of place in the supernatural life as it is in a family relationship. Jesus Christ appears not as guest whom one receives according to the rules of polite society. Christ is at home with us and we are at home with Him. What is ours is His also; He is truly one of the family.

We realize that occasionally brothers disagree shamefully. We not only betrayed our Elder Brother, Christ, as did the brothers of Joseph, but we nailed Him to a Cross.

Mary's role is to assuage the terrifying sense of guilt of the culprits; after reconciling the brothers she re-establishes the cordial union which must exist between children of the same mother. The maternal mediation demands that the reconciliation on both sides must be spontaneous, personal and complete. Friendships severed for a time usually bear permanent scars even after the friendship has been restored. But the reconciliation effected by a mother effaces even the memory of the passing differences, and the fraternal bond remains forever. Therefore, the filial love for Mary develops and preserves an intimacy which is often deeper and more secure than the union with Jesus Christ.

MARY AS EDUCATOR

All the souls who formerly were deceived by the somber grandeurs of Calvinism and Jansenism failed to cultivate a tender devotion to the Mother of Jesus. Their outlook was inclined to the harsh interpretation of the greatest mysteries of Christianity. If those haughty, straight-laced Christians could have been guided by Mary, could have understood better the kindness and humanness of the Savior, they would have refrained from exaggerating the importance of the strength and the justice of God in the Christian life.⁷⁵ Instead of emphasizing the bitterness of sin and of justice they should have learned to appreciate the humble gentleness of a God Who had chosen to be our Brother. If Mary could have guided these souls, austere by nature, she might have prevented that destructive heresy which was entirely incompatible with any filial or fraternal spirit. The cooling hands of the living Mother could have softened the harsh hearts and prevented the zealots, eager to reform others, from going to the extremes of schism and abuse. If these misguided individuals had been more childlike and less warlike, they would have loved, possessed, and imitated the gentle Savior.

So in our time, a genuine devotion to the Mother of Jesus will prevent our militant leaders from an interior life which is disturbed by the weaknesses, the inconsistencies, and the frequent hypocrisies which constitute human nature; this devotion will scatter the shadows of servile fear and of scruples and will accustom Mary's followers to concentrate

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not on their own evil inclinations but on their brotherhood in Jesus Christ.

For effective results in the apostolate of Catholic Action, Mary recommends methods which are free from any fanatical or radical tendencies. When religion appeals primarily to the emotions the response is usually excessive and short-lived. An intemperate spirituality can lead souls to sinful animosities and foolhardy undertakings. An overwrought spirit of zeal produces an excessive strain in the mind and will and forges them, as it were, into weapons of steel.

What can our Model teach these over-zealous souls? Under the gentle guidance of Mary souls gradually acquire the two great virtues which moderate all of their actions; namely, a spiritual childlikeness and a supernatural prudence. Although Mary's clients may possess a love for Christ as generous and as ardent as that of any enthusiastic martyr, nevertheless this same love will be gentle, tranquil and peaceful; a serenity and cheerful confidence permeate their spirituality and apostolic work.

DEVOTION TO THE INCARNATE WORD

From the Mystery of the Incarnation, Mary teaches us the consoling lesson of filial and fraternal relationship with Her Son, the Man-God. Another very important idea we learn: no pagan philosophy, no humanism, nor any other religion resembles Christianity in the utilization of material objects as sacraments and as a means of aiding us to become other Christs.

MARY AS EDUCATOR

Without a doubt Christ, by assuming our human nature, bestowed upon it an incomparable dignity. Was not His Human Body the instrument by which He redeemed us? Although He is the Center of our religion, how would He have shown us specifically the prominent place His Sacred Body has in our Christianity, were it not for His Mother?

Let us look to her again. While it is impossible for us to describe the nature of the transformation which the birth of Christ produced in the spiritual life of Mary, we do say that her immaculate soul, filled with the highest spirituality, preserved her interior union with God while she attended to the material needs of her friends. We may say that Mary's spotless virginity withdrew her from the natural tendencies and even from the earth, but her glorious maternity brought her back so forcibly and so completely that from that time on it was impossible to separate that which God had united in her, namely, divinity and humanity—the Creator and the creature. Any mother understands how completely a child dominates her heart and her mind. From the moment of the child's birth, his physical needs must be satisfied; and it is the mother who is bound, as it were, to care for all of these material needs.

Although our Blessed Mother, our model, submitted to all of the demands of nature in rearing her Child, never was her progress in the Love of God retarded; on the contrary, the birth of her Son re-established for Mary the perfect union of the physical

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and spiritual in the contemplation and in the adoration of her God. Her own Child was God, and between the Mother and Child a perfect harmony existed.

The visible and tangible presence of her dear Child aroused in Mary's heart a tenderness which stimulated her love for God. As she wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, as she taught Him to smile, as she dried His tears, and as she pacified the annoyances of His first teeth (who am I to know the thousand details which each day demands of a mother?) we are certain that Mary's faith and love animated her every movement, and that her holiness increased with every maternal attention lavished upon her Child.

Mary likewise instructs her followers in a true, realistic spirituality, for she shows them how to find God in the ordinary physical and material situations to which all mankind is subject. The mortal Body of Christ is no longer on earth and if It were, It would be in one definite place, inaccessible to many; but we are blessed in the possession of His Eucharistic Body and of His Mystical Body. We are mindful of the essential difference between the hypostatic union of the God-Man Whom Mary saw and the mystical union of the Militant Church which we see. However, for us as well as for Mary, it is the *Body of Christ* which redeems us and leads us to Heaven.

Sometimes the very modesty, the insignificance, and the lowliness of our way of life become re-